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BOCCACCIO AND ROMANCE

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BOCCACCIO AND ROMANCE

by

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In loving memory of my father,

William Lawrence Mezzetti, B. B. A., 1951.

For my mother, Roxie Davis Mezzetti.

BOCCACCIO AND ROMANCE

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This dissertation traces Boccaccio's engagement with the genre of romance as both a writer of romances and an avid critic of the genre. It will show that even when he wrote his masterpiece, the *Decameron*, he still struggled to resolve the conflict between his continuing attraction to the genre he tried to master, and his resistance to it because of its association with illness, in particular, lovesickness.

After an introduction devoted to theories and definitions of romance relevant to Boccaccio's own conception of the genre, the dissertation will examine his continuing engagement with the genre by looking at two moments in his literary production: 1) the time he spent in Angevin Naples composing romances; and 2) the period in republican Florence during which most of the *Decameron* was written. Each of the two phases under consideration reveals a distinct attitude on the author's part toward romance, but all point to an irrepressible impulse to draw on his experience as a reader, writer, and critic of this

genre. Inasmuch as Boccaccio actively pursued a career as a writer of romances during his period in Naples, the works he wrote there will be examined to show what Boccaccio's conception of romance was and how they prepared the author to write the *Decameron*. Then we will see how Boccaccio, in writing the *Decameron*, spurned the long-winded romance, the genre of his youthful literary debut, in favor of the more manageable *novella*, although even these short tales, which seem the opposite of romance, continue to use elements of that genre, either themes, structures, or images and motifs.

A principal problem in the study of Boccaccio is a failure to consider fully that he was influenced by every type of romance available to him throughout his career. While critics have discussed this matter in terms of individual works, no one has examined why or how Boccaccio experimented with romance throughout his career. I am not denying that Boccaccio was influenced by the works of Dante and Petrarch, who openly spurned romance in their works. What I am saying is that he found something worthwhile in romance and used it to his own ends.

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Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian to English are by the author.

INTRODUCTION

When, in his prologue to the *Decameron*, Boccaccio informs us of his intention to recount *cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo* ("a hundred stories or fables or parables or histories or whatever you choose to call them"),[1] he reveals his preoccupation with form. Because he understood that the label *novella* might prove too new for less adventurous readers, he alternated the term with generic labels more easily identified by his audience. He also subtitles the work *Galeotto*, the name of a widely popular romance that portrays the adventures of Lancelot. Clearly, before Boccaccio recounts the tales themselves, he wants to give readers some idea of what to expect. Although each of the narrative forms mentioned above proves indispensable to Boccaccio when composing his one hundred tales, in these few introductory pages, he alludes in particular to terms his audience would have associated with medieval romance—*Galeotto* and *istoria*. These terms, together with *novella*, are problematized in his romances, the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, as well as in the *Decameron*.

At issue is how to interpret Boccaccio's deployment of terms generally associated with romance, *Galeotto* and *istoria*, in his prologue to the *Decameron*, a collection of one hundred relatively short tales, *novelle*. To Boccaccio, *Galeotto*, the simplest of these terms, spoke to a well-defined genre and work, both indicating the *Prose Lancelot* and evoking the scene in Dante's *Inferno* in which the wayfarer speaks to Francesca about this same text. By contrast, *istoria* is more complicated. Michelangelo Picone suggests that, in mentioning *istoria*, literally "history" or "chronicle," Boccaccio indicates the type

of cultural artifact that contributed material utilized by authors of romance. Picone says that *istoria* (or *historia*) in Boccaccio's time could mean a narrative of antiquity, be it recently composed (as in the case of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, one of Boccaccio's sources for the *Filostrato*) or an account of adventure (as in the case of the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*). Though they might have been grounded in ancient history, the plots of these *istorie* fed the imagination of authors like Boccaccio, who drew from them to create the embellished narratives we tend to categorize as romance.[2] Finally, *novella*, a word that entered vernacular Italian during Boccaccio's time, referred generally to something new and modern. One thinks of Boccaccio's *novella* as a brief story in which the protagonist successfully exercises his wit, "whether it be in simple verbal interchange, in the operation of some clever plot (even fraud), or … defensively to cope with one's enemies" and to avoid misfortune brought about by circumstance.[3]

In this Introduction, I will examine theories of the genre, as well as theories of genre in general, and formulate a working definition of romance. Then I will look at two phases in Boccaccio's literary production: the time he spent in Angevin Naples composing his romances, the*Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, and his time in Republican Florence, during which he wrote most of the *Decameron*. Though each phase reveals a

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[1] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1987), 9. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (New York: Penguin, 1995), 1. All future citations to *The Decameron* in Italian and English are to these editions.

[2] Michelangelo Picone, "Il romanzo di Alatiel," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995): 197-217. Picone asserts, "Col titolo *historia* si caratterizza infatti nel Medioevo la produzione narrativa di materia antica, sia storica (come nel caso dell'*Historia destructionis Troiae* di Guido delle Colonne) sia avventurosa (come nel caso della *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*); titolo che troviamo impiegato tanto nelle opere latine quanto nei loro volgarizzamenti." [The title *historia* characterizes narrative production in the Middle Ages of matters of antiquity, whether historical (as in the case of the *Historia destructionis Troiae* by Guido delle Colonne) or adventurous (as in the case of the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*); we find this title used as much in Latin works as in their vernacular counterparts.]

distinct attitude toward romance, both point to Boccaccio's impulse to draw on his experience as a reader, writer, and avid critic of the genre. I will examine how the works he produced in Naples prepared him to write the *Decameron* and show how the *Decameron's* short tales, although they appear to spurn romance in favor of the more compact *novella*, employ the themes, structures, images, and motifs of the genre. Unlike his most immediate literary predecessors and mentors, Dante and Petrarch, who openly condemned romance and preferred to compose poetic forms such as the lyric and the epic, Boccaccio allowed himself this risky undertaking. In doing so early in his career, he was practically guaranteed an audience, given the genre's popularity. In the *Decameron*, however, he was more inclined to subvert the conventions of romance to point to its potential narrative faults and, perhaps, to signal its status as a relic of the world of the courts. We will see that he came to identify the meandering narrative of romance with sickness—especially lovesickness—and he deployed it in the*Decameron* as a foil to his *novella*, a narrative type he regarded as health-giving.

In this dissertation, I seek to answer the following questions: Having written two exemplary romances, why does Boccaccio proceed to expose the genre's inherent flaws in the *Decameron*, focusing on them at the geographical center of the work, the tale of Madama Oretta (VI, 1)? What does it mean that Boccaccio casts Calandrino, one of the work's most comical characters, in the role of "mad hero" of what Giuseppe Mazzotta has dubbed his own romance cycle?[4] Finally, what motivates Boccaccio to treat romance

[3] Thomas G. Bergin, *Boccaccio* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 289.
[4] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Mazzotta refers to the four tales in which Calandrino appears as "a veritable romance of which he is the mad hero," 198.

in so many ways in the *Decameron*? I will show that by placing romance in a dialectical relationship with the *novella*, he hopes to nudge readers into believing in the *novella's* superiority. Indeed, while it is clear that the *novella* ultimately proves to be the work's most characteristic generic form, it emerges as such only in response to the other genres Boccaccio mentions in his prologue (*favole*, *parabole*, and *istorie)* and especially to one he does not: *romanzo*or romance.

Ironically, however, I will also show that Boccaccio deploys the themes, structures, images, and motifs of romance in antithesis to those of the *novella* to such an extent and with such virtuosity that despite his denigration of the genre, he persuades us that romance continued to be, for him, a stable and relevant form, not a flawed and archaic one. Both the narrator (Boccaccio) and the storytellers of the *brigata* come to recognize that the *novella's* clever protagonist, who can manage misfortune brought about by circumstance, cannot exist without his opposite, the hero of romance, who often finds himself a victim of this same misfortune. Moreover, the hero of romance, often a powerless victim of *Fortuna*, reminds readers that the notion that humans have absolute control over the whims of *Fortuna* is neither plausible nor realistic. Finally, when we consider what the Plague, the backdrop to his work, has revealed about the limited ability of human beings to control their fates, we can see why romance is unavoidable in Boccaccio's tales.

Theory

For literary theorists such as Northrop Frye, Patricia Parker, and Eugène Vinaver, the wandering, or evasion, so crucial in a romance is its defining feature. They see romance as mirroring the nonlinearity of human existence. Rather than follow a straight and narrow path, people stray from their itinerary in life. Though individuals might want to devote themselves to pursuing a prescribed goal, they often find themselves stalled in counterproductive situations because of circumstances beyond their control. Whereas Frye focuses on the entire journey made by the romance hero in the course of the narrative to reach a particular goal, Parker and Vinaver look closely at that portion of romance in which the hero wanders or errs.

In terms of defining the structure that characterizes the long romance narrative, Frye's formulation in the *Anatomy of Criticism* is particularly useful. He argues that a quest, either secular or religious, is at the heart of romance. The secular quest involves acts of chivalry and knight-errantry, such as a knight's rescue of damsels in distress, while the religious quest retells legends of saints. In Frye's view of romance, the protagonist is superior to the other men in his environment, and although his actions are marvelous, he is identifiably human. Generally, this hero's quest turns out to be his rite of passage. Frye then divides romance into three stages: the hero's perilous journey and preliminary minor adventures; the critical struggle, usually some kind of battle in which the hero or his enemy, or both, must die; and the hero's ultimate triumph, especially in the eyes of society. Frye labels the three stages, respectively, conflict, death-struggle and discovery, and the recognition of the hero. In the first stage, the hero must leave his

community in order to take part in the ritual perfecting of his character through his adventures. In the second stage, the hero achieves enlightenment and triumphs over his most serious opponent. In the final stage he returns to his community and revitalizes it. Whether or not the hero has vanquished the enemy, the community looks upon him as a positive and reinvigorating force in a barren landscape. The hero's completion of this ritual is, for Frye, the equivalent of a wish-fulfillment dream or fantasy.

In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye associates the idea of an individual who can withdraw and err, but then return stronger and more capable of leading a community, with the very idea of fiction (15). He contends:

> Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest.[5]

Specifically, the romance hero's journey mirrors the journey an individual makes through life. The tendency to characterize the protagonist as a traveler who returns underpins all fiction, which originates with a character who sets out because of instinct but returns enlightened. This hero, then, over the course of the narrative, undergoes a change in character typical of most heroes in works of fiction.

Rather than focusing, as Frye does, on the entire three-part structure of romance, Patricia Parker in *Inescapable Romance* privileges Frye's first two stages, which emphasize errancy and adventure. The more complicated and convoluted the hero's

[5] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 15.

adventure—that is, the "fatter" it is—the better, for this complexity keeps readers engaged with the text. Like Frye, Parker sees romance as the core of all fiction, but for different reasons. She argues that these first two stages, where information is relayed in bits and pieces, create the opportunity for deconstructive, generative moments in reading. A text that requires extensive time to read lends itself to delayed reading, which in turn can lead to moments in which the meaning of the text is deferred. The more delayed the adventure, the more fruitful this arbitrary moment can be. At this arbitrary moment, a reader will experience a momentary confusion that is increased by the length, complexity, and resulting ambiguity of the passage, and the reader will then formulate his own version of what is happening in the narrative. In this formulation, half-knowledge is favored over fact. For Parker, the "meantime" wherein the reader wonders what is happening, is the crucial moment and does not necessarily lead to an end, or the *telos* of romance that Frye finds so important.

Finally, in *The Rise of Romance*, Eugène Vinaver, sees medieval romance as a decisive break from epic, and is more concerned with the particulars of this historical genre than with its universality. Vinaver devotes most of his discussion to deciphering the "fat" structure of romance and comes up with an aesthetic theory—*entrelacement*—to make sense of it. *Entrelacement*, or interlaced composition, refers to the construction of romance as a series of recurrent moments laid one upon another, with the sum of those moments comprising the whole. Vinaver argues that romance unfolds in episodes that may occur synchronically, may have already happened, or could be about to happen. Rather than provide one unified action, as the *novella* generally does, the romance takes

several themes and characters and puts them in different episodes, which makes for great variety and discontinuity in the narrative. While Parker privileges the reader's fertile experience of mystification, Vinaver seeks to demonstrate how the threads intertwine to create a tapestry. For Vinaver, mystification is but a momentary experience for the diligent reader, who will be demystified at the story's end by grasping the romance as an interwoven whole.

Unlike Parker, Vinaver does not encourage readers to linger in Frye's first two stages. While Parker encourages us to bask in the generative moment, the immanency of half-knowledge, Vinaver sees value in reaching an endpoint and considering the text as a harmonious whole. For Vinaver, like Frye, romance is closed, while for Parker, it is open, always dilating and deferring meaning. In general, the three critics' conceptions largely overlap, despite their different emphases and theoretical viewpoints. All see romance as having a tripartite structure, most of which is concerned with the hero's wandering and adventures, and as ending with his victory and his return to the community his actions have redeemed.

The History of Romance

> The marriage of matter and meaning, of narrative and commentary, was the key to the new kind of narrative poetry—the poetry that assumed in the reader both the ability and the desire to think of an event in terms of what one's mind could build upon it, or descry behind it.[6]
>
> Romances were composed 'in such a way that one could never find one's way about them': in some cases this was

[6] Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 23.

> true; but whether the incoherences were real or merely apparent was immaterial to the reader unwilling to be involved in structural complexities. The ideal form of narrative for such a reader was the *novella*—a short tale with a single theme, capable of crystallizing a particular situation around a few summarily drawn characters. What gave the genre its original impetus in France was not simply the influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but a spontaneous reaction against 'interlaced' composition.[7]

Although all romances may have the general features described by Frye, Parker, and the particular ones described by Vinaver, the genre takes on different forms in different cultures and historical periods. In France, where romance originated, the designation *romanice* referred to all literature in the vernacular, although it later came to signify more specifically imaginative works in octosyllabic verse whose subject matter was fictional or nonhistorical, works we would call "romances."[8]

In her article "Between Romans and Romantics," Rita Copeland examines the variety of ways the term *romans* has been used, from its original meaning in Latin to the literary construct of Romanticism. Copeland shows how, early on, the word from classical Latin, *romanus*, meaning "of or belonging to Rome," came to signify in medieval Latin the authority and institution of the Christian Rome of late antiquity as opposed to the pagan enemies of the Church. After the fall of the Empire, however, *romanus* acquired a contradictory meaning in that it came to signify both that which was Roman and that which was no longer Roman. In literary terms, for example, it came to

[7] Ibid., 95. Vinaver quotes from Janet M. Ferrier's *Forerunners of the French Novel* (Manchester, 1934), 31.
[8] This material concerning romance comes from the entry "Medieval Romance," in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 486-88.

indicate the vernacular rather than Latin because while the term *romanus* traditionally suggested the idea of "the unity, stability, and endurance of Rome, it was simultaneously co-opted in the Middle Ages to signal postimperial fragmentation" (216). Copeland notes that

> In Old French the term *romans* (also spelled *romanz*, *roman*, *romance*, *romant*, and used as adverb, adjective, and substantive) is attested for the first time in the mid-twelfth century: it means the vulgar tongue, the vernacular. The etymological and cultural force of *romanus* is clearly visible here: *romans*, or French, is the native tongue that claims its descent from the Roman language, spoken in a region once part of the Roman Empire and differentiated by its "Roman-ness" from the Germanic constituencies of what was once the Frankish kingdom. Here *romans* means the popular or vulgar language, French, in opposition to Latin, the learned language of theology, canon law, science, and philosophy.[9]

By the thirteenth century, the definition of romance had become increasingly blurred. Any tale of adventure could be labeled a romance, and the adventure could be chivalric or amorous in nature. Furthermore, romances began to appear in prose. Despite the difficulty in pinning down a definition of medieval romance, the following characteristics are common to most romances produced between the early and the late Middle Ages. First, romance cycles traced their origin to either Arthur ("the Matter of Britain") or Aeneas ("the Matter of Rome"). More important, romance was distinguished from the epic *chanson de geste* by a series of factors: its less heroic tone, its greater structural intricacy, its fondness for the fantastic, its more superficial characterization, the

presence of a love interest, and its less rigorous structure and less unified action. Romances, unlike epics, tended to be episodic and paratactic in structure and style.

Romance, as Boccaccio knew it, was the genre that dominated his literary world. Having evolved in Western Europe from works called "histories," such as the groundbreaking *Historia Regum Brittaniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*, 1130-1139) by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the love lyrics of troubadors such as Marcabru and Bernart de Ventadorn, romance was a narrative based in fact but with a hefty amount of supplemental fancy and embellishment. As an established literary form, it could address pertinent issues for the niche group—the minor nobility of the baronial courts—who comprised its chief readership. In her *Empire of Magic*, Geraldine Heng notes:

> Among the genre's objects of attention are crises of collective and communal identity—the identity of the emerging medieval nation of England, or of pivotal racial groups, or even of Latin Christendom—as well as pressing economic, military, religious, and social conundrums of different kinds.[10]

A burgeoning market economy and a newly literate class in courts throughout Europe meant that a significant number of people with leisure time could read for pleasure. This new audience, which included women, sought alternatives to the ancient and medieval epic (Vergil, but also the *chansons de geste*) as well as to the Latin literature of the Church, which included, for example, saints' lives and apocryphal stories such as the Harrowing of Hell. These courtly readers were satisfied by a new type of

[9] Rita Copeland, "Between Romans and Romantics," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33 (1991),

court poet who combined a scholastic and theological education with training in the ideals of chivalry, and who created a vernacular literary tradition that spoke to the reality of their courtly society. In twelfth-century France, for example, Chrétien de Troyes—who lived at the wealthy noble court of Marie de Champagne and Henri le Libéral, Countess and Count of Champagne—composed romances in verse. In early-thirteenth-century France, Jean Renart wrote *Guillaume de Dôle*, and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun co-wrote the metaphysical work *Le Roman de la Rose*. In thirteenth-century Germany, Gottfried von Strassburg circulated his polished *Tristan und Isolt*. In Spain, at the end of the thirteenth century, the anonymous *Amadís de Gaula*, a popular text based on the chivalric romances of Chrétien, appeared.

In fourteenth-century England, just as romance seemed to be declining elsewhere, an alliterative version gained popularity. This type of romance was connected with the baronial and nationalistic courts of the Midlands that opposed London's political and literary dominance. Alliterative romance, a traditional genre dating back to Germanic antiquity, featured line units that relied on alliteration to link and emphasize important words within them. The basic structure of this verse was not stanzaic or linear; rather, each verse in a verse group comprised a metrical unit. A sentence may begin or end in the middle of a line, and the verses may be strung together in long paragraphs that convey a characteristic parallelism of thought and diction.[11] A superb example in Middle English is

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216.
[10] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 3.
[11] This material concerning alliterative romance comes from the entry "Alliterative Meter," in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 16-17.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which deals with the matter of Britain (Arthur), and whose author remains anonymous.

To understand Boccaccio's involvement with romance, we must examine the formal shift romance writers made from rhymed verse to prose, as well as Dante and Petrarch's attitudes toward the genre. Medieval theologians concerned with poetic theory, such as Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* and Bonaventure in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, held that poetry recounted nothing but lies, while prose, the language of chronicle, of history, told the truth. Moreover, Dante critiques romance in *Inferno* V, the canto in which the wayfarer encounters Paolo and Francesca. Petrarch treats romance with equal contempt, most notably in his moralistic verses in the vernacular *Trionfi*, a compendium of universal moral judgments about desire, virtue, death, fame, time, and eternity. Critics speculate that the unfinished work represented Petrarch's attempt to bring order to well-known, but never systematically treated, moral and philosophical ideals he found in some thirteenth-century manuscripts he possessed. In the following passage of *Triumphus Cupidinis* ("The Triumph of Desire"), he includes romance in the list of works produced by excessive desire:

> Ecco quei che le carte empion di sogni:
> Lancillotto, Tristano e gli altri erranti
> onde convien che 'l vulgo errante agogni.
> Vedi Ginevra, Isolda e l'altre amanti,
> e la coppia d'Arimino che 'nseme
> vanno facendo dolorosi pianti.[12]

(Here too are those who filled our books with dreams:

[12] Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi Cupidinis*, ed. C. Appel (Halle, 1901), vv. 79-81.

> Lancelot, Tristram, and the other knights
> whose wand'rings lead the common folk astray.
> See Guinevere, Isolde and the other lovers,
> and the couple from Rimini who together
> move about crying painful tears.)[13]

For Petrarch, the fantastic adventures and fabulous characters of romance represented vanity and dreams. Noteworthy in his poem is the repetition of the word *errante*—"wandering," "erring" —which refers not only to knights but also to anguished lovers.

Despite the criticisms of Dante and Petrarch, evidence shows that romance was popular in the Italian peninsula. Starting in the twelfth century, Arthurian figures appeared on cathedral walls, Arthurian names were popular, and the legend of Lancelot and Guinevere was recited in lyrics, as well as in longer *canzoni* (songs) by *cantari* (traveling singers, entertainers). Noteworthy in the Italian versions of the matter of Arthur, and in particular, the Lancelot and Guinevere episodes, was a palpable anxiety regarding the sin of adultery. When Andrea da Barberino (1372-1431) wrote his *Aspramonte* (an adaptation of the adventures of Lancelot), for example, he focused more on the knight's heroic deeds than on his amorous exploits.[14]

Dante and Petrarch were by no means, then, the only writers to evince moral qualms when it came to treating in romance, especially in the tradition of Lancelot and Guinevere, what French critics call *Fin'Amors*. This concept of love, according to L. T. Topsfield, developed around 1100 in the lyrics of the troubadours. In its simplest terms it referred to the fusion of physical and mental desire with spiritual aspiration—that is, the

[13] *The Triumphs of Petrarch*, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 23.
[14] *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters (New York: Garland, 1996), xxxv. In general, for the way in which Arthurian legend made its way into Italy, I rely upon the editor's Introduction.

ideal of *cortesia*, the sum total and the outward expression of all the courtly virtues. Gradually, however, the *topos* began to take on a different meaning. In the songs of later courtly poets, *Fin'Amors* was understood as love that

> demanded complete obedience and submission to the lady who in her lover's eyes was the image of beauty, the ideal of all courtly virtues, the source of true joy and the cure for the suffering she inflicted.[15]

What began in the songs of the twelfth-century troubadours as an ideal of transcendent love developed in romance as love meant to remedy the inevitable problems brought about by feudally arranged marriage. However, while critics of French romance such as Topsfield and Matilda Bruckner see in this *topos* the possibility of easing the suffering brought about by a forced marriage, in the Italian tradition it was generally condemned as an excuse to break the vows exchanged in marriage, a justification to commit adultery. In the French literary tradition, *Fin'Amors* is seen as the hero's just reward, while in the Italian tradition, beginning with the *stilnovisti*, *amor cortese* (courtly love) is employed by the poet/lover to inspire contemplation of the divine. The ideal lover in the Italian courtly tradition is transfixed by *amor cortese* so that he can transcend earthly love. Whereas in French romance, the sexual consummation of this type of love is often a matter of course, in the Italian tradition of courtly love, beginning with the

[15] L. T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 109. See also, Matilda Bruckner, "An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Charrette*?" *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1996), 61. Lancelot's night of love with the queen represents no problem morally, for Bruckner notes "Their night of love is, according to the custom of Logres, nothing more than Lancelot's just due: having won Guenièvre by force of arms, the knight may do as he pleases, *sans honte et sanz blasme*. Here is Lancelot's perfect justification, not in the

stilnovisti poets, this concept becomes an opportunity to turn earthly love into a spiritual epiphany.

Romance was thus a well-developed, albeit infamous, genre by the time Boccaccio began pursuing a literary career. The *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* were meant to appeal to the literary tastes of the courtiers he encountered at Robert's court. During these formative years, under the pretense of studying law at the University of Naples, Boccaccio frequented the Royal Library of the Angevin court, which was directed by Paolo da Perugia, an encyclopedist and compiler (as Boccaccio would one day be himself). Robert's capital, for the nobility at least, flourished thanks to money provided by both Florentine banking houses, represented by the likes of Boccaccio's father, Boccaccino, and a thriving sea trade, largely in the hands of foreigners—Florentines, Catalan, Genoese, and Marseillais. With these financial resources at his disposal, Robert built a magnificent library that housed not only works of science and theology, but also romances in Old French and Provençal.[16]

Years later, Boccaccio drew on his extensive experience with the genre for use in the *novelle* of the *Decameron*. At the work's beginning, he declares:

> Comincia il libro chiamato Decameron cognominato prencipe Galeotto, nel quale si contengono cento novelle in diece dí dette da sette donne e da tre giovani uomini.[17]
>
> (Here begins the book called *Decameron*, otherwise known

secret value system of courtly love, not in the marvelous realm of the *pays de Gorre*, but in the time-honored customs of Arthur's own kingdom."

[16] Bergin, *Boccaccio*, 21-3, 31.

[17] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 3.

as Prince Galehalt, wherein are contained a hundred stories,
told in ten days by seven ladies and three young men.)[18]

This statement accomplishes two contradictory things: explicitly, it provides an alternative title for the work, *Galeotto*, that invites the reader to see it as romance; but implicitly, it warns readers not to interpret what follows as one. For in mentioning *Galeotto* (Prince Galehalt), the Arthurian character who arranges the fatal tryst of Lancelot and Guinevere, Boccaccio brings to mind Dante's infernal couple, Francesca and Paolo. Dante's text provides an important framework for understanding the *Decameron's* treatment of romance, for in it he highlights the tendency of romance readers to linger over the work—a tendency that determines the tragic fate of Francesca and Paolo:

Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amore lo strinse:
soli eravamo e sanza alcun sospetto.
Per più fïate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.
Quando leggemmo il disïato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

(One day to pass time away, we read
of Lancelot—how love had overcome him.
We were alone, and we suspected nothing.
And time and time again that reading led
our eyes to meet, and made our faces pale,
and yet one point alone defeated us.

[18] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 1.

When we had read how the desired smile
was kissed by one who was so true a lover,
this one, who never shall be parted from me,
while all his body trembled, kissed my mouth.
A Gallehaut indeed, that book and he
who wrote it, too; that day we read no more.)[19]

Had Paolo and Francesca continued to read this work, they would have witnessed the repetition of the episode in question, as well as a revelation of the deception involved—that is, the tryst organized by Galehalt in which Guinevere betrays Arthur by kissing his most esteemed knight, Lancelot. They would read of the consequences the two lovers faced for their lustful action, as well as of the appearance of a false Guinevere. They would see a king so desperate to erase his wife's betrayal that he believes in the false Guinevere, though in the end he realizes his error, while his knights severely condemn Lancelot for his relentless defense of the true Guinevere. Finally, Paolo and Francesca—and any diligent reader—would witness Guinevere's sorrowful regret and repentance, recounted in one of the last chapters of *Lancelot*:

Ha, Galehot, fait elle, or ai je greignor mestier de conseil que je n'oi onques mes, et por Deu consilliez moi, car je sai bien que cele damoiselle qui a tenu le roi Artu en sa prison l'a si torné a lui que j'en avrai assez dolor; si quid bien et croi que ce m'avendra par mon pechié, por ce que je ai meserré vers le plus proudome del monde.[20]

("As God is my witness, Galehaut," she said, "I need your advice now more than ever. Please help me! I am sure that

[19] *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), lines 127-138.
[20] *Lancelot: roman en prose du 13e siecle*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Geneve: Droz, 1978), 230.

> what that damsel has done to King Arthur in her prison is going to bring me no little trouble; yet I have no doubt that it will come to me through my own sin, because I behaved so badly toward the worthiest man in the world.")[21]

Had Dante's lovers chosen not to linger over the moment of the fateful kiss, they might have avoided death and eternal damnation. Instead, caught up in the titillating scene, they remain unaware that the characters' act will not prove worth the price.

Parker's theory in *Inescapable Romance* is useful when we consider how the fifth canto of Dante's *Inferno* influenced Boccaccio's decision to use *Galeotto* as the *Decameron's* subtitle. Had Paolo and Francesca known the result of Lancelot and Guinevere's transgression, they might never have erred. Dante implies here that the responsibility rests with the author to compose a morally righteous narrative, one that reveals the consequences of erring even as he writes about erring. It matters, in short, that Paolo and Francesca "read no more." Had they read further, they would have understood the consequences. By contrast, in the *Comedy*, there is no need to read ahead. Even readers who never get beyond Canto V would not want to imitate Paolo and Francesca since their fate is already known. As Giuseppe Mazzotta claims in *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, romance is critiqued by Francesca's own words. Her statement about reading no more comes directly from the moment in Augustine's *Confessions* when Augustine converts and realizes that he need read no further ("*nec ultra legere volui*") in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As in the *Confessions*, so in the *Comedy*—we are made to

[21] *Lancelot-Grail: The Old Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 266-267.

understand that errant behavior has consequences and is therefore undesirable.[22] Boccaccio, then, seeks to shift the burden from the writer to the reader.

In a romance, desire drives the protagonist to act. In Boccaccio's view, readers might react to desire in one of two ways: they might diligently read on, eager to find out what happens next, or they might be tempted to imitate Dante's protagonists and act on desires of their own. When Boccaccio chooses *Galeotto* as the *Decameron's* subtitle, he thus does so ironically. He could have chosen any popular romance title, such as *Tristano*, but he chose the one that told the story of the betrayal of King Arthur by Lancelot and Guinevere, and the one Francesca and Paolo were reading in Dante's *Inferno* V at the moment their fate was sealed. While Dante chose the title *Galeotto* for its power to represent an emblematic cautionary tale, Boccaccio made of it a generic term, one that could represent the entire genre of romance. In this way, Boccaccio lets us know that his *Decameron* is like a romance in that it is potentially full of a variety of situations and characters, some positive and others negative. His model reader, however, like Dante's is being cautioned not to use fiction as an excuse to imitate questionable behavior. Through his subtitle, Boccaccio also presents romance as a "pimp" or "go-between"—a textual Pandarus. Boccaccio thus urges us to be responsible for our own reactions to his *novelle* rather than using them as an excuse to transgress.

Considering his use of *Galeotto* as a subtitle for his work, it is surprising to find that Boccaccio urges his readers to interpret his tales as *novelle*, *favole*, or *istorie*—and that the option of romances (*romanzi*) is conspicuously absent from the list. The omission

[22] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 166. The

is especially significant because he presents romance in so many ways: as a defective form in need of a remedy in VI, 1, the tale of Madama Oretta; as a form whose heroes are inevitably vulnerable to the whims of *Fortuna* in Day II; and as a purveyor of heartache, lovesickness, and, consequently, illness in the romance of Calandrino. Thus, even in *novelle* that seem to directly oppose romance, he produces stories that are filled with romance elements. In fact, Boccaccio shows us throughout the *Decameron* that his *novella* results from his need to correct the multitude of narrative problems presented by romance. At the same time, he acknowledges, the new form cannot exist without the older one.

In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio seems to share Dante and Petrarch's belief about the genre—that is, reading romance is potentially dangerous, even fatal. For Boccaccio, however, romance did not necessarily represent the reading experience that victimized Dante's Francesca. For him, "the illusory self-enclosure of the romance"[23] did not necessarily lead to hell. Rather, romance was unhealthy because it featured protagonists who required too many pages of text—that is, too much time—to extricate themselves from difficulty. While romance presents a moral problem in Dante, for Boccaccio it is problematic in terms of its form—it is too long, complicated, and convoluted. The episodic romance reflects a lifespan more closely than does the *novella*. Its long text gives characters space to wander and therefore err, as individuals do over the course of a lifetime. Boccaccio acknowledges that this narrative space requires a diligent reader who would not be overwhelmed by the genre's prolixity. Thus, in the *Decameron* he presents

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translation of Augustine's Latin text is from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin

short stories as well as long ones in an effort to get his audience to temper their appetites for the fits, starts, anticlimaxes, and climaxes that occur over many episodes in a romance. While Boccaccio unabashedly promotes his *novella* in the*Decameron* , he does so by presenting it in the context of the conventions of older and more established forms, among which romance is the most important.

The Critics

Critics of Boccaccio's works in the last twenty-five years have increasingly turned to his *opere minori in volgare* (minor works in Italian) to provide a more complete portrait of the author, who was the first of the *literati* to lecture publicly on Dante's *Comedy*. Robert Hollander in *Boccaccio's Two Venuses*, Janet Levarie-Smarr in *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover*, Stephen Grossvogel in *Ambiguity and Allusion in Boccaccio's Filocolo*, and Victoria Kirkham in *Fabulous Vernacular* look to Boccaccio's less popular works—*Filocolo*, *Filostrato*, *Caccia di Diana*, *Fiammetta*, and *Teseida*—with various objectives in mind.

In the late 1970s, Hollander explored the theme of love—in particular, carnal versus spiritual love—to account for what he regarded as a disparity between the quality of Boccaccio's early romances and the *Decameron*. He refers to the "immature" Boccaccio of the earlier works as an author who had not yet found his ultimate literary vocation, that of a Christian moralist on a par with the Renaissance humanist Desiderius

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(Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986), 178.
[23] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 169.

Erasmus. He sees Boccaccio's earlier *opere minori in volgare* as a prelude to a more important accomplishment, his humanist life in books, which culminates in the last book of the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, a general defense of poetry.[24] My study is indebted to Hollander's inasmuch as I, too, see the earlier romances as precursors to the *Decameron*. Ultimately, however, I cannot agree with Hollander's conclusion that Boccaccio became a Christian moralist in any conventional sense, especially because Hollander fails to account for the conundrum of the *Corbaccio*. Boccaccio's last work of fiction, the *Corbaccio* is, on its surface, a highly misogynistic tale that recounts the dream of its protagonist. In this dream, the protagonist meets the deceased husband of a lady who has recently scorned him, and the two men, former husband and former lover, proceed to viciously disparage her, together with love, ladies and romance, in extremely graphic terms. In his commitment to the goals of spiritual and intellectual perfection in this text, Boccaccio abandons the more humanistic values he relished in the *Decameron*.[25] Literally, the *Corbaccio* is a bitter invective that seems a step backward in terms of Boccaccio's intellectual development. What he says in it disqualifies him from being considered a conventional Christian moralist.

Levarie-Smarr and Grossvogel also examined Boccaccio's early works in the vernacular to determine how he treats the theme of love and how this treatment elucidates our reading of the *Decameron*. Levarie-Smarr's work appears to be a natural outgrowth of Hollander's: she argues that the more mature Boccaccio came to moralize in his writing and ultimately wanted to write for the intellectual few. She believes, like

[24] Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 123.

Hollander, that Boccaccio withdrew into the humanist notion of writing. In her work, however, Levarie-Smarr raises another issue of particular importance for my study. She argues, as I will, that when romance came to the Italian peninsula, its implicit suggestion that lovemaking outside of marriage or before marriage could sometimes be justified by *Fin'Amors* proved problematic to the Italian public. In Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, his version of the French romance *Fleur et Blanchefleur*, Levarie-Smarr points out:

> The concern for marriage before love-making is new… Although Boccaccio uses elements from both twelfth-century French versions [of *Fleur et Blanchefleur*], neither [one of them] includes the exchange of vows until after the couple has been caught and pardoned.[26]

Levarie-Smarr is arguing that in the *Filocolo* Boccaccio touts the virtues of monogamy from a theological point of view. She alludes in particular to his *Comento* on *Inferno* V in which he discusses God's deliberate choice of providing Adam with one wife, Eve, and Eve with one husband, Adam. When we look at both the *Filostrato* and the *Decameron*, it is clear that he did not subscribe to the belief that sex outside of marriage was always a punishable act.

In *Fabulous Vernacular*, Kirkham argues for a reevaluation of the *Filocolo*, which she believes contemporary critics have unfairly overlooked. Based on the existence of fifty-two manuscripts from the Renaissance, evidence that, though never a bestseller,

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[25] Bergin, *Boccaccio*, 202. Bergin cites Marga Cottino-Jones, "The *Corbaccio*: Notes for a Mythical Perspective of Moral Alternatives," *Forum Italicum* 4 (1970), 506.

the work enjoyed a respectable popularity, her study calls for reconsideration of it as a masterpiece of prose fiction. She reminds us of the *Filocolo*'s status as "the first sustained work of prose fiction in Italy, … the most ambitious prose narrative to its day in any European vernacular."[27] Although I do not share her enthusiasm, I rely on Kirkham's observations when I discuss the *Filocolo* as an exemplary romance that appealed to audiences for three centuries after it was written.

In the last twenty-five years, critical studies of the *Decameron*—especially those by Vittore Branca, Guido Almansi, Millicent Marcus, Gregory Lucente, Michelangelo Picone, Stavros Deligiorgis, and Antonio Enzo Quaglio—have claimed that romance was a vital force in the work. Whether glossing words, images, or themes, looking at a single *novella*, or examining the trends in a day of storytelling, these critics have shown the importance of romance elements in the *novella* and have generally substantiated the idea that romance was a significant force in the *Decameron*. However, they all stopped short of explaining how Boccaccio processes romance throughout the ten days, and they do not look at how his earlier romances prepared him to treat it in the *Decameron*.

Boccaccio's Sources

Precisely which romances Boccaccio knew is the subject of much speculation among scholars, but reliable evidence has led Salvatore Battaglia to claim that the *Filocolo* is based on two twelfth-century French lyrics—two songs recounting the romance of *Fleur et Blanchefleur*, which were being sung by popular *cantari*. Vincenzo

[26] Janet Levarie-Smarr, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo*: Romance, Epic, and Allegory," *Forum Italicum* 12 (1978), 38.

Crescini has further proven that at least one version was sung in franco-veneto dialect.[28] And M. Gozzi argues, in "Sulle fonti del *Filostrato*: Le narrazioni di argomento troiano," that in addition to the well known texts of Benoît de Sainte-Maure and Guido delle Colonne, which are the most likely sources for the *Filostrato*, Boccaccio probably drew on shorter prose versions, such as the *Roman de Troie en prose*, the *Libro della Storia di Troia*, the *Istorietta Troiana*, and the *Romanzo barberiniano*.[29] Finally, it seems probable that he was familiar with the *Lancelot en prose*, as evidenced by his choice of the subtitle of the *Decameron.*

Scholars have recently expanded the list of romances Boccaccio might have known. Deligiorgis, in "Boccaccio and the Greek Romances," shows how the story of Alatiel (*Decameron* II, 7) both mirrors and spoofs elements found in Greek romances such as Xenophon's *Anthia and Habrocomes*, Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*.[30] Lucente in "The Fortunate Fall of Andreuccio da Perugia" suggests the *Roman de Renart* cycle and Beroul's *Tristan* as possible sources for vocabulary items, such as the word "Malpertugio," the district of Naples wherein Andreuccio's adventures unfold.[31] And Branca notes the obvious parallel theme of the persecuted woman in *Decameron* X, 10, the story of Griselda, and in Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*.[32] Finally, we know that Boccaccio spent time in Rome (he was there in 1366-67

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[27] Victoria Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 2.
[28] Salvatore Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del Medioevo* (Napoli: Editore Liguori, 1965), 645.
[29] Giulia Natali, "A Lyrical Version: Boccaccio's *Filostrato*," in *The European Tragedy of Troilus*, ed. Piero Boitani (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989), 50. Natali cites M. Gozzi, "Sulle fonti del *Filostrato*: Le narrazioni di argomento troiano," *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 5 (1968): 123-209.
[30] Stavros Deligiorgis, "Boccaccio and the Greek Romances," *Comparative Literature* 19 (1967): 97-113.
[31] Gregory Lucente, "The Fortunate Fall of Andreuccio da Perugia," *Forum Italicum* 10 (1976), n. 8, 342.
[32] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, n. 6, 1232-33.

on a diplomatic mission at the court of Pope Urban V), and as William W. Kibler informs us, a manuscript containing Chrétien's *The Knight with the Lion* and *The Knight of the Cart* is found today in the Holy City.[33] Thus although we can only speculate as to whether Boccaccio had firsthand knowledge of all these texts, we cannot rule out the possibility that he knew romance and its conventions extremely well.

In the medieval literary universe, the *fabliau* and the *lai* were opposed to the romance. While both are short narrative poems in octosyllabic couplets, the *fabliau* is usually comic, realistic, and obscene; it is openly critical of socially accepted institutions and tends to indulge the senses in order to whet the appetites (erotic, gastronomic, economic).[34] In his analysis of the genre, R. Howard Bloch explains the distinction between the ends of romance and the ends of short tales such as *fabliaux*:

> unlike romance, which is continuous and in certain cases (e. g., Perceval) interminable, the fabliaux offer a quick fix. They are short and dirty; but they clean up their own mess, and they never leave any loose ends.[35]

The *lai*, on the other hand, generally treats issues related to love, marriage, and desire. In a *lai*, the main idea is explicitly stated, and the poem is primarily didactic.[36] Glending Olson and Charles Muscatine trace the popularity of the *fabliau* and the *lai*, especially in the twelfth century, to the clerical practice of using stories in sermons to move audiences,

[33] Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. and ed. William W. Kibler (*Erec and Enide*, trans. Carleton W. Carroll) (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 2.
[34] R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 11.
[35] Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, 127.
[36] Mortimer J. Donovan, *The Breton Lay: A Guide to Varieties* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 84.

a practice that was justified by Aristotle's advice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[37] Aristotle claims that reading short stories provides pleasure and is thus a source of physiological well-being.[38]

If the *fabliau* and the *lai* were valued for their contribution to health, then Aristotle's assertion about the relationship between reading short stories and physiological well-being may also be applied to Boccaccio's *novelle*. Indeed, Olson suggests that for Boccaccio, the pleasure resulting from short stories, as opposed to that of long romances, could serve as mental therapy, thereby making us healthier and better individuals. Pleasure generated by brief stories restores us so that we return reinvigorated to daily labor. And this is precisely what happens to the *brigata* in the*Decameron* during their two-week sojourn in the country before they return to Florence.[39]

As I noted, the narrator of the *Decameron* suggests that his stories can be read as *novelle*, *favole*, or *istorie*—that is, as *novelle*, short tales with a single theme, capable of crystallizing a situation around a few summarily drawn characters; as *favole*, short tales that revolve around the delivery of a distinct moral message; or as *istorie*, chronicles or histories, news heard in the neighborhood or narratives devoted to ancient history. As I also noted, however, it is surprising, given that the work's subtitle is *Galehalt*, that *romanzo* is absent from this list of generic forms. My purpose in this dissertation is to

[37] Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 106. Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 136-7.
[38] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 103-105.
[39] Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 136-7.

examine this conspicuous absence, and to show how romance (or many mini-romances) may be found at the heart of the work.

Chapter Summaries

After discussing the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* in Chapter 1, in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I consider the *Decameron*, which initially appears to be a backlash against these two prior texts, and in which I look at moments where romance is deployed with different ends in mind. Each of these chapters examines Boccaccio's relationship to romance from a different point of departure. In Chapter 2, I show how the story of Madama Oretta critiques the interminable nature of romance–that is, its tendency to present a multitude of characters in a number of episodes that seem to go on infinitely. In Chapter 3, however, I argue that Boccaccio valued romance and culled the genre for material to make good stories on Day II. Then, in Chapter 4, I show how Boccaccio's narrators rely on romance techniques in their ingenious storytelling.

The chapters show that while his early romances constitute hard evidence of Boccaccio's ability to compose examples of the genre, his deployment of it in the *Decameron* is at times deferential and at times critical. I begin a discussion of the work at its midpoint because Madama Oretta's critique is an important reminder of how the reader should consider what came before (that is, the romances of Day II) and what follows (for my purposes, the romance cycle of Calandrino, which occurs on Days VIII and IX). Her critique is significant in that it reminds us that we readers need to be critical of stories and in a discreet way. Rather than let the knight sweep her off her feet with his

narrative (as Dante's Francesca did in response to the *Lancilotto*), she reads it discriminatingly, and discreetly articulates her dissatisfaction to him with her *motto*. In this way, Madama Oretta epitomizes what it means to be *avveduta* in Boccaccio's understanding.

Chapter 1 examines the first of two moments in Boccaccio's life in which romance played a significant role—his sojourn in Naples. Although urged by his father to pursue a banking career and to study law, Boccaccio had little interest in either. Instead, dazzled by the elegance of urban life in the Angevin capital, he cultivated friendships with intellectuals, courtiers, and nobles, and also sought to improve his social status by writing romances to entertain his companions. Boccaccio probably wrote both the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* before he was thirty. Although neither work holds the same appeal as the *Decameron* for later audiences, both have formal elements common to romance, and both enjoyed considerable popularity in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In addition, both influenced significant literary works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Keats, and others.

The composition of these early works reveals Boccaccio's ability both to manage the vast scope of romance and to deploy the motifs and themes associated with the genre. First, at the heart of each of these romances is a quest. Second, both works adhere to the tripartite structure of romance—that is, the withdrawal and adventures, the climactic battle and the final social reintegration of the hero—as defined by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. Furthermore, they both explore how the pursuit of love by the

protagonist endows him, as a result of being in love, with enhanced physical prowess, thereby making him a better soldier, fighter, and lover. Finally, the characters are noble, use magical talismans, and encounter supernatural forces that help or hinder them. But in Boccaccio's interpretation of romance, love is problematic and must be domesticated in marriage (as in the *Filocolo*), or it will lead to ruin (as in the *Filostrato*).

Chapter 2 focuses on *Decameron* VI, 1, the *novella* of Madama Oretta. In general, Day VI contains the shortest stories. As the midpoint of the work, the first story of that day offers an important message delivered by a lady who initially resembles a character out of romance. Her story unfolds, however, not over many pages, but expeditiously and succinctly. The telling of short, witty tales constitutes an implicit critique of romance that affirms the health-giving value of the *novella.* Boccaccio's message in VI, 1 is different from the one he offered at the work's beginning. Instead of warning his audience of the moral risks associated with reading for pleasure, he suggests that if one is prudent and discreet, reading and the erotic desires it generates can be satisfying, fulfilling, and worthwhile. Good stories, after all, potentially contain a message that encourages multiple interpretations and that has social and/or moral lessons. For Boccaccio, the pleasure we get from reading stories can serve as therapy for the mind, making us healthier individuals.

I will substantiate these claims by examining the *Novellino* analogue for the Madama Oretta story, and by discussing romance as a storytelling genre that differs from the model of the short tale advocated by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and

practiced by Boccaccio generally in the *Decameron*. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle privileges a particular kind of storytelling for its ability to ease the weary mind. Pleasure generated by a brief story restores us so that we return reinvigorated to our daily labor. This Aristotelian notion corresponds to the medieval conception of the function of the *lai*, the *fabliau*, and the stories of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. It especially fits VI, 1, in which the main characters either engage in storytelling or serve as listeners, for the purpose of making a long, arduous walk more pleasurable.

Chapter 3 constitutes a close examination of Day II of the *Decameron*—the perfect place to look at Boccaccio's indebtedness to the genre with which he began his career. Day II, more than any other day, contains stories that resemble romances. Not only are they among the work's longest tales, but their plot structures are the most episodic and their characters find themselves most vulnerable to the whims of *Fortuna*, the goddess who rules over the world of romance. The stories conform to the dictate of its queen, Filomena:

> Finisce la Prima giornata del Decameron: e incomincia
> la Seconda, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Filomena,
> si ragiona di chi, da diverse cose infestato, sia oltre
> alla sua speranza riuscito a lieto fine. (129)
>
> (Here begins the Second Day, wherein, under the rule
> of Filomena, the discussion turns upon those who after
> suffering a series of misfortunes are brought to a state
> of unexpected happiness; 115.)

Thus we are cued to expect stories that contain a series of episodes (or a series of misfortunes) rather than being organized as one unified action. Although each story has a rather neat and happy resolution, their endings sprawl over many pages and are anything but concise.

In addition to examining I, 10, the story of Maestro Alberto da Bologna (which I look at because it serves as a precursor to the romances of Day II), I analyze II, 8, the story of the Conte d'Anguersa, and II, 10, the story of Maestro Ricciardo di Chinzica. All but one of Day II's stories meet Frye's requirements for the tripartite adventure as a feature of romance. Only the tale of Bartolomea (II, 10), Maestro Ricciardo's kidnapped wife, fails to meet the requirement.

However, although Boccaccio employs conventions of romance throughout Day II, thus seeming to valorize it, he is critical of romance even here and subverts the genre's conventions in order to demonstrate their absurdity. As Millicent Marcus points out, he exploits the conventions that especially emphasize *Fortuna's*power, but he also reveals his ambivalence toward romance by showing that characters who passively succumb to fortune, such as Beritola, are inferior to those, such as Andreuccio and Alatiel, who are able to use their wit to counteract unfavorable circumstances and thereby achieve happy endings.[40]

Finally, in Chapter 4, I will discuss Boccaccio's use of *entrelacement*, the technique by which recurring moments are overlaid one upon another, with the sum of those parts creating a whole. I will focus on Calandrino, who is featured as a protagonist

in a story woven through four *novelle* in Days VIII and IX. Calandrino reappears in the tales just as the hero does in episodes from a romance cycle. Chapter 4 also considers the way in which Boccaccio uses romance structures for bawdy *novelle*, especially in Days VIII and IX. Although we are meant to laugh at Calandrino, who takes his adventures seriously, Boccaccio is continuing his critique of the genre from VI, 1.

While the *brigata* laugh heartily at Calandrino's victimization, their need to repeat his stories reveals their own feelings of helplessness in the face of *Fortuna*. I argue that for Boccaccio belief in the magical world of romance was a mistake, for it often victimized its followers, whereas the trickster works to shape events in a world where romance is just another fiction he can use to dupe others. Nevertheless, as the presence of romance elements in the *Decameron* from start to finish suggests, and as the*brigata's* recurrence to Calandrino reinforces, Boccaccio and his characters need romance. Just as Calandrino is the anti-trickster whose failures allow the members of the *brigata* to define themselves *against*, in *opposition to*, him, so romance is the anti-*novella* without which the *novella* could not exist.

[40] Millicent Joy Marcus, *An Allegory of Form* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1979), 43.

CHAPTER 1

"The Early Romances: the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*"

Before considering the ways in which Boccaccio weaves romance and its various motifs into the *Decameron* (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4), it is worthwhile to examine closely his own attempts at reproducing it in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*. In doing so we can see how the author treated the genre in its pure form. While it is true that these works enjoyed a considerable popularity in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, not only are they not read today with nearly the same frequency as the *Decameron*, but critics refer to them as belonging to Boccaccio's minor works.[41] However one may evaluate Boccaccio's success in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, those texts nevertheless reveal that he really did understand the requirements involved in writing romance. A close look at the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* will show that both works possess formal elements common to romance. Second, while they are not widely read today, they did succeed in influencing many literary masterpieces produced after them. Indeed, they were widely read for two or three centuries after Boccaccio composed them, and clearly influenced

[41]The following studies represent a sampling of the negative commentary on the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*: Salvatore Battaglia, in *Giovanni Boccaccio e la riforma della narrativa* (Naples: Liguori, 1938), "A voler considerare il *Filocolo* nella sua struttura romanzesca, non se ne vede l'unità: è dispersivo, troppo episodico, discordante di toni e di proporzioni" (155:"In wanting to consider the *Filocolo* in its structure as a romance, we see in it no unity: it is dispersive, too episodic, discordant in tones and proportions"); Thomas Bergin, in *Boccaccio* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), enumerates the following defects of the *Filocolo*: "the digressions are annoying, the lengthy speeches and the self-conscious parading of classical erudition, the want of discipline are aesthetic blemishes" (90); Robert Hollander, in *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) in discussing the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, says, "Perhaps no other major writer has had his 'minor works' so little read and ill regarded" (2); and Antonio Enzo Quaglio, in *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio* (Padua: Liviana, 1967) calls the text of the *Filocolo* a "spessa corazza in cui è imprigionato il testo" (7:"a thick breastplate of armor in which the text is imprisoned").

significant literary works by important authors: Chaucer's *Troilus* is based on Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, and his "Knight's Tale" on the *Filocolo*. Both these works in their turn shaped Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, as well as Fletcher's and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[42]

We will also return to the *Decameron* to consider how the subtitle reminds the reader of romance yet fundamentally pits that work against the genre. My purpose here is not to explain the failure of the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* from the perspective of a modern reader but rather to examine these works 1) to see how Boccaccio conceived romance when he was actually composing it, and 2) to illuminate his later use of the genre in the *Decameron*. What will emerge in this analysis is the fact that while Boccaccio reproduces the features of popular romance when he writes his own, he also includes in them his own literary and cultural heritage. Boccaccio writes popular romances that reflect the influence of his own literary culture, in particular, his reading of epic, the works of Dante, and the poetry of the *stilnovisti*. The combination of these influences paired with the models of popular romance of his day makes for a result that, while European, yet is unique. I will show that in his own romances, Boccaccio manipulates variables in the stock romance of his day—adulterous love and the dictates of chivalry, community versus individual interests—through either domestication (as in the *Filocolo*) or destruction (as in the *Filostrato*).

A close examination of both the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* reveals, first, that Boccaccio is an accomplished romance writer, and second, that like most romance

[42] In addition, Keats' work, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, is based on Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. See Thomas Bergin,

writers, he does not completely subscribe to the values romance promotes, namely all the values of chivalry and courtly love. Clearly, Boccaccio is aware of what drives romance and is familiar with its three-part structure as well as its *topoi*. Specifically, both the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* contain to a certain extent two elements of conventional romance: 1) they both adhere to the three-part structure of romance; that is, they are both organized around the withdrawal, adventure, and re-integration of the hero, as defined by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*; and 2) they both explore how the pursuit of love by the protagonist endows him, as a result of his being in love, with enhanced physical prowess, making him a better soldier, fighter, lover, etc. In order to substantiate these claims, I will often cite exemplary passages from Chrétien de Troyes' romances, using him to show what an exemplary romance writer was doing. Chrétien de Troyes' romances thus function in my discussion to show that Boccaccio knew the elements of romance, and that he manipulated them with much insight. Indeed, he did so as successfully as his forerunners.

In terms of the fundamentals of romance, both the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* appear true to type. At the heart of romance is a quest in which the protagonist must pursue a valued object. Furthermore, the characters who inhabit the genre are noble and sometimes use talismans for their magical powers; and there is plenty of supernatural intervention that either helps or hinders them. Both of Boccaccio's works contain these elements, albeit in varying degrees. In the *Filocolo,* for example, Florio pursues Biancifiore, the valued object of his quest, and is the son of the King and Queen of Spain.

Boccaccio, p. 92.

Furthermore, when at his father's command Florio must leave Biancifiore, she gives him a magic vermilion ring. This ring had been handed down to her from her ancient ancestor Scipio, and she promises it will appear clear as long as she is safe, and will turn murky in color should she find herself in danger (2.20-21). Finally, near the end of the work, prior to Florio's conversion to Roman Catholicism, various gods manipulate circumstances that directly affect the lives of the main characters. In the first book, for instance, the god of the underworld, Pluto, angry at Lelio (Biancifiore's father) for making a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela to thank God for his wife's long-awaited pregnancy, appears on earth disguised as a knight and tells the king an incriminating tale which leads to Lelio's wrongful execution (1.9). Furthermore, later on in Book 2, Florio and Biancifiore fall in love while reading a text of Ovid, because of manipulation by Venus and her son Cupid (2.2).

Likewise, in the *Filostrato* Troilo quests after the object of his desire, Criseida, and is a Trojan prince, son of Priam and brother of Hector. When Troilo seeks evidence to prove to himself that Criseida has betrayed him with another, he relies on a piece of jewelry to substantiate his suspicion. While this piece of jewelry does not exactly constitute a magical talisman, the circumstances of its appearance are almost supernatural coincidences. When it appears and where it appears in the course of the story is significant. Near the end of the work, Troilo's belief that Criseida has a new lover is confirmed when he notices a brooch attached to Diomede's garment. This brooch, acquired by his brother Deiphobo in a battle, represents victory to Deiphobo, the spoils of a battle won. Troilo, however, recognizes the brooch as the one he had given to Criseida

as a token of his love the morning after their last night together. Furthermore, Troilo prays to the gods throughout the work for various favors. He prays to Venus at the beginning, for example, to win Criseida (1.53-57), and he prays to Jove in the end to condemn her for her betrayal of his love (8.17-18). Finally, Troilo believes that Criseida's treachery was revealed to him in a dream in which a wild boar tore out her heart without inflicting any pain on her or invoking protest on her part.

In the various medieval French Lancelot cycles, which Boccaccio could have read at the Angevin court of Robert the Wise in Naples precisely at the time he was writing his own romances, Lancelot is consistently portrayed as naïve and emotionally vulnerable, torn between allegiance to his king, Arthur, on the one hand, and to his lover, Arthur's wife, Guinevere, on the other. And while his particular plight by no means applies to all knights of the Round Table, we may take him to represent the stock romance hero, especially when we consider his presence in the fifth canto of Dante's *Inferno*. In Boccaccio's extensive commentary on the portion of this canto devoted to the story of Paolo and Francesca, not only does he recount what allegedly happened to the historical figures, Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, but he also explains that in her speech to the wayfarer, the character Francesca claims that *Galeotto*, the romance that tells the story of the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere served as a *mezzano*, a pander, to them which in turn led the adulterous couple to their deaths. In his commentary,

Boccaccio glosses the famous line from Dante's fifth canto, *Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse* ("Galehaut was the book and he who wrote it"),[43] as follows:

> Scrivesi ne' predetti romanzi che un prencipe Galeotto, il quale dicono che fu di spezie di gigante, sì era grande e grosso, sentì primo alcuno altro l'occulto amor di Lancialotto e della reina Ginevra; il quale non essendo più avanti proceduto che per soli riguardi, ad istanzia di Lancialotto, il quale egli amava maravigliosamente, tratta un dì in una sala a ragionamento seco la reina Ginevra, e a quello chiamato Lancialotto, ad aprire questo amore con alcuno effetto fu il mezzano: e, quasi occupando con con la persona il poter questi due esser veduti da alcuno altro della sala che da lui, fece che essi si basciarono insieme. E così vuol questa donna dire che quello libro, il quale leggevano Polo ed ella. Quello officio adoperasse tra lor due che adoperò Galeotto tra Lancialotto e la reina Ginevra; e quel medesimo dice essere stato colui che lo scrisse, per ciò che, se scritto non l'avesse, non ne potrebbe esser seguito quello che ne seguì.[44]
>
> (In the aforementioned romances, they write about a certain Prince Galehaut, who, they say, is some sort of giant, so great and big of stature was he. When Galehaut first heard of the secret love of Lancelot for Queen Guinevere, which had not gone beyond the stage of stolen gazes between the two, at the behest of Lancelot, whom Galehaut loved marvelously, he seeks to help this affair begin by playing the role of mezzano. One day he convinces Queen Guinevere to come to a room where she can be alone with that Lancelot. And it is as if his great size has the power to prevent the two from being seen by anyone else, thus allowing them to kiss each other. And in this way, this woman [Dante's Francesca] wants to say that this same book, which she and Paolo were reading, made the two of them engage in the same action that Lancelot and Queen Guinevere

[43] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), line 137. All further citations to Dante's *Comedy* are to this edition.
[44] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, ed. Giorgio Padoan (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1994), 324.

> did through Galehaut; and that same person [Galehaut] was he who wrote it, so that if he had not written it, what happened to her and Paolo never could have happened.)

It was certainly this gloss of Lancelot's story that influenced Boccaccio's alternate title for the *Decameron, Galeotto*.

When critics such as Erich Auerbach write of the importance among the European literary public of Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot* for its portrayal of the courtly love ideal, they are more concerned with the capacity of these texts to represent "this lofty, humble, adulterous love [which] became a European ideal."[45] However, they ignore the fact that romance heroes such as Lancelot, Florio, and Troilo become, at moments, questionable heroes. In particular, in the course of the Arthurian legend, no matter which version is considered, Lancelot constantly misreads stories, is misread by his fellow characters, and is buffeted about, defenseless, by the unpredictable winds of romance. Yet readers, generation after generation, in spite of his internal vulnerability, and probably because of his external invulnerability, unfailingly hold him up as a champion and a hero. Even though he is clearly flawed in that he finds himself hopelessly in love with his king's wife, he is able to continue to perform heroic deeds on behalf of King Arthur. Unlike Aeneas, the epic hero who abandons Dido because of his need to follow his destiny and found Rome, Lancelot, the romance hero, remains fervent in his love for Guinevere, no matter what the consequences. Moreover, he is, without doubt, Arthur's greatest knight,

[45] Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 219-220.

no matter which version of his story is examined, from the twelfth-century interpretation of Chrétien, to the made-for-television miniseries adaptation of the early twenty-first century.

As mentioned above, both the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* deploy the threefold structure of romance, which requires the hero to leave home, journey and engage in adventures, and then return home again. The central concern of the *Filocolo,* which is divided into five books consisting of four hundred fifty-nine chapters, is the romantic adventures of the two main characters, Florio and Biancifiore. Their story does not effectively begin until the second book, and concludes in the fourth. The first book contains the genealogy of both Biancifiore and Florio, and the fifth book tells what happens once the married couple returns to King Felice's kingdom. Furthermore, the main story line within the three central books serves merely as a frame for an extravagant narrative, teeming with episodes and digressive subplots. Thus the *Filocolo,* in terms of plot, resembles both Frye's threefold structure mentioned above, and that which Eugène Vinaver describes in his book *The Rise of Romance* where he proposes that romance structure is an extended series of episodes interlaced throughout a composition, a structure he refers to as *entrelacement*.

In Books 2, 3, and 4, the two lovers, Biancifiore and Florio, fall in love at the court of Marmorina (present-day Seville), but are soon after separated, as Florio's father decides to send his son away to study in Montoro. Once his son departs, the king sets about to have Biancifiore killed. King Felice, who has devised a plan with a wicked seneschal to discredit Biancifiore, claims to his people that Biancifiore has tried to poison

him, and thus he condemns her to death. Meanwhile, the gods warn Florio of Biancifiore's impending and wrongful death, and he arrives at court just in time to save her. The seneschal confesses Biancifiore's innocence just before he dies, but does not reveal the involvement of the king in the plot to inculpate and murder her. Florio then returns to Montoro, after giving thanks to all the gods except for Diana. This omission is significant because Diana, angry at having been forgotten, proceeds to manipulate circumstances throughout his adventure, circumstances that make Florio's quest to rescue Biancifiore extremely difficult.

Once he has returned to Montoro, Florio is in such great desperation because of his love for Biancifiore that the Duke of Montoro and Florio's tutor Ascalion try to distract him with other women. Florio almost gives in to temptation, but is reminded by the god of Love of his vow of love to Biancifiore, and he thus rejects the advances of the women sent to him by the duke and Ascalion. Likewise, at the same time, Biancifiore is being wooed by Fileno, a stranger at court who is encouraged by the king and queen to pursue her. In order to please the queen after a tournament in which Fileno has performed victoriously, Biancifiore gives him a veil which he shows to Florio at Montoro. Upon recognizing her veil, Florio believes that Biancifiore has betrayed him, and thus vows revenge against Fileno. The remainder of Book 3 treats the wanderings of Fileno from Marmorina to Naples to Certaldo in order to flee the wrath of Florio, and recounts his bitterness over his treatment by Love, and by women in general. At the end of Book 3, the queen sells Biancifiore and her maid, Glorizia, into slavery. When Florio discovers what has happened to Biancifiore, he changes his name to Filocolo, which he believes

means “labor of love” in Greek. (Actually, the correct name in Greek, according to scholars, would be Filopono or Filocopo.)[46] After changing his name, Filocolo leaves home, family, and princely duties behind to find her.

Book 4 contains the true adventure portion of the romance of Biancifiore and Florio, now called Filocolo. In it, the hero and his retinue are on their way to Sicily, and stop at Pisa where they hear of Fileno who has been turned into a fountain. In their attempt to reach Sicily, a storm forces their boat to Naples where they must remain for many months. At this point in the romance, Filocolo meets the characters Fiammetta and Caleon, and participates in the famous episode known as the *Questioni d’amore*. This episode presents Filocolo’s encounter with Caleon, a fashionable young Neapolitan he befriends, and Fiammetta, daughter of the king of Naples, who is described as being almost as beautiful as Biancifiore. After the group visits the tomb of Virgil, they all retreat to a pleasant grove where Fiammetta suggests they discuss issues concerning love (the *questioni d’amore*). She presides as queen, and they all proceed to discuss thirteen questions of love, each one accompanied by some sort of anecdote that exemplifies the issue at hand.

Scholars have discussed the significance of this episode in terms of its relationship to the whole text because of its obvious similarity to the proceedings of the *brigata* in the framework of the *Decameron*. Whatever one may conclude about the episode, Filocolo afterwards finds himself as intent upon finding Biancifiore as ever. Once it concludes, the prince is able to set sail safely for Sicily, where he learns that

[46] Bergin, Boccaccio, 341, n. 11.

Biancifiore has been taken first to Rhodes and then to Alexandria, where she had been bought by an admiral. Filocolo makes the voyage to Rhodes, where he learns more about Biancifiore, and then ultimately to Alexandria, where the two lovers are united, then finally married.

The last book of the *Filocolo* recounts the couple's voyage back to Marmorina where the prince's parents are suffering because of their son's extended absence. It also tells of Filocolo's conversion to Roman Catholicism when he meets a monk, Ilario, in Rome. As in most traditional romances, in the end the hero is reintegrated into his community and endows it with a renewed sense of vitality. Filocolo not only presents his parents with a new wife and son, but he also reveals to them a new faith as well, and then he manages to convert not only his parents, but his whole kingdom as well from pagan polytheistic worship to Roman Catholicism. Thus, while his quest was initially for the object of his desire, Biancifiore, it is transformed into one involving newly discovered faith and spirituality.

The *Filostrato*, written in ottava rima and divided into nine parts, is shorter and less digressive than the *Filocolo*, but the object of its hero's quest is, as in the case of Florio, the object of his desire. The hero of the *Filostrato*, Troilo, however, remains in his community and pursues the object of his quest, the widow Criseida, while in the meantime he wages war against the Greeks. Troilo's adventure is psychological rather than physical. Rather than withdraw from his community literally, he withdraws emotionally in that he engages in a secret affair with the daughter of a traitor to his people. Set against the backdrop of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, the story

of Troilo begins when he sees Criseida, daughter of the traitor priest Calchas who has fled Troy for Greece, and falls in love with her. Since she is the relative of his close friend Pandaro, Troilo, after suffering from lovesickness and desperate to win her, decides to enlist Pandaro's aid in order to make her aware of his interest in her. When Pandaro reveals to Criseida what he knows of Troilo's feelings for her, she is initially ambivalent, concerned about her virtue on one hand, but intrigued at the prospect of an affair with a handsome young man on the other.

After considerable deliberation on her part, and much persuasion by Pandaro, Criseida decides to encourage Troilo's advances, and has a secret affair with him. This portion of the *Filostrato* constitutes the protagonist's adventure. Both lovers are ecstatic with each other, until one day when they receive news that Calchas has made a deal with the Trojans to trade a Trojan prisoner of war for his daughter. Both Troilo and Criseida are devastated by the prospect of being separated, but Criseida convinces Troilo that she must go in order to maintain her good name. In the end, Criseida leaves the Trojan camp and Troilo to rejoin her father in the Greek camp. Once she has left the Trojan camp, at first she laments the loss of Troilo, but as time goes on, she seems to forget about any allegiance to him and takes up with the Greek prince Diomede. Devastated at having lost Criseida, Troilo returns to the battlefield looking for Diomede and revenge, but instead is brutally slain by Achilles. The physical empowerment he experiences at the elation of being in love in the end diminishes because of Criseida's abandonment of him. Boccaccio innovates here by having the hero and heroine separated because of her lack of fidelity, and ending with the slaying rather than the triumph of the hero. Traditional romance

generally ends in a positive way, usually represented with some sort of ritual such as a marriage (*Cligés*) or a holiday feast (*Erec and Enide*). Even if the protagonist returns to his community no more enlightened than in the beginning, a romance usually ends with a celebration. Thus when Criseida betrays Troilo with another lover, and Troilo dies afterwards, angry and seeking revenge, Boccaccio is departing radically from the traditional romance ending.

If Boccaccio clearly knows romance plot and character conventions and deploys them in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, he also conceives love much as other romance writers did. That is, while love can make for a bolder and more courageous hero, it also makes for one obviously flawed precisely because of the distraction that being in love poses. Indeed, most romance heroes engage in rash actions when it comes to love. This takes place so often that narrators are prone to characterize the lover's heart as having a life of its own. Thus, the hero of romance falls in love because of some irrational impulse. In Chrétien's *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, for example, Lancelot is so consumed with love for Guinevere that he risks the shame of riding in a cart (the vehicle used to transport those guilty of treason or murder) in order to find and rescue the queen who has been abducted by Meleagant. In this scene, after a brutal battle with her captors, Lancelot finds himself without a horse. When he then encounters a dwarf driving a cart, Lancelot asks him whether he has any knowledge of the queen's whereabouts. The dwarf claims that if Lancelot gets into the cart, he will know by the next day what has happened to the queen. Although he is fully aware of the consequences associated with the stigma

of riding in a cart, Lancelot still opts to get into the cart because of his love for Guinevere. Lancelot faces an emotional dilemma that is depicted as follows:

> Mes Reisons, qui d'Amors se part,
> Li dit que del monter se gart,
> Si le chastie et si l'anseigne
> Que rien ne face ne apreigne
> Dom il ait honte ne reproche.
> N'est pas el cuer, mes an la boche,
> Reisons qui ce dire li ose;
> Mes Amors est el cuer anclose
> Qui li comande et semont
> Que tost an la charrete mont.[47]
>
> (But Reason, who does not follow Love's command, told him to beware of getting in, and admonished and counselled him not to do anything for which he might incur disgrace or reproach. Reason, who dared tell him this, spoke from the lips, not from the heart; but Love, who held sway within his heart, urged and commanded him to climb into the cart at once. Because Love ordered and wished it, he jumped in; since Love ruled his action, the disgrace did not matter.[48])

Lancelot decides to get into the cart because he is so overwhelmed by emotion at being in love with Guinevere that he cannot think and act rationally. Even though Lancelot is conflicted internally, however, as is Troilo, he is able to will his body to go and perform its duty. Even after committing the folly of jumping into a cart, Lancelot eventually does find the queen and rescues her. In a similar way, in the *Filocolo*, Florio is driven by love to the rash act of severing ties with his parents, the king and queen, and leaves their

[47]Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Daniel Poiron (Quetigny: Gallimard, 1994), 516. All citations from Chrétien in the original are from this edition.
[48]Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Kibler (*Erec and Enide* trans. Carleton W. Carroll) (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 212. All citations from Chrétien in English are from this edition.

kingdom on a long journey to find Biancifiore. And in the *Filostrato*, Troilo finds himself on the brink of suicide when Criseida leaves Troy, but is saved by Pandaro, who tries to console him by reminding him that there are other women in the world to pursue. In the end, however, Troilo's uncontrollable anger leads him to death at the hands of the enemy.

A common element in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* that brings into full focus Boccaccio's understanding of romance is the way in which both Florio and Troilo are seemingly ambushed by Love (almost a character itself) in the scenes in which their love affairs begin. The manner in which both heroes are portrayed—they are helpless victims of lovesickness and circumstance, hoping for supernatural intervention to remedy their situations—at times brings into question their stature as heroes, as it did in most romances of Boccaccio's time.

On a dangerous journey to save the queen in *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart,* for example, Lancelot reflects not upon his own well-being, but rather upon Guinevere's. His state of mind is described as follows:

> Et ses pansers est de tel guise
> Que lui meïsmes en oblie,
> Ne set s'il est, ou s'il n'est mie,
> Ne ne li manbre de son non,
> Ne set s'il est armez ou non,
> Ne set ou va, ne set don vient;
> De rien nule ne li sovient
> Fors d'une seule, et por celi
> A mis les autres en obli;
> A cele seule panse tant
> Qu'il n'ot, ne voit, ne rien n'antant.[49]

[49] Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes,* 524-25.

> (His thoughts were so deep that he forgot who he was; he was uncertain whether or not he truly existed; he was unable to recall his own name; he did not know if he were armed or not, nor where he was going nor whence he came. He remembered nothing at all save one creature, for whom he forgot all others; he was so intent upon her alone that he did not hear, see, or pay attention to anything.[50])

Like Lancelot, both Florio and Troilo fall in love, and both privilege their beloved above all else, often forgetting themselves and resorting to reckless behavior because of their feelings.

In the *Filocolo*, for example, the narrator recounts how Venus and Cupid conspire in order to make Florio and Biancifiore fall in love while the two are reading Ovid's love poetry. Rather than having any agency of their own, Florio and Biancifiore fall in love because of the intervention of the gods. After seeing them reading Ovid, Venus instructs Cupid to fill both of them with desire. Cupid does so to Florio by covering him with kisses, and to Biancifiore by breathing gently onto her face. The desire with which Cupid fills the young couple is referred to as a *hidden poison* by the narrator:

> E i giovani, rimasi pieni di nuovo disio, riguardandosi, si cominciarono a maravigliare stando muti. E da quell'ora in avanti la maggior parte del loro studio era solamente in riguardar l'un l'altro con temorosi atti; né mai l'un dall'altro, per alcuno accidente che avvenisse, partir si volea, tanto *il segreto veleno* adoperò in loro subitamente. (125)
>
> (The young couple were left full of a new desire; they looked

[50] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: Knight of the Cart*, in *Arthurian Romances*, 216.

at each other and began to marvel as they stood there in silence.
and from that hour on, the greater part of their care was simply
to gaze on one another with timorous gestures; nor could the
one ever bear to part from the other, no matter what happened.
So quickly did *the hidden poison* work in them; 48, my emphasis.)[51]

Like young Florio and Biancifiore in the *Filocolo*, Troilo in the *Filostrato* is characterized as a plaything of the gods at the moment he is seized by Love:

Né s'avvedea colui, ch'era sí saggio
poco davvanti in riprendere altrui,
che Amor dimorasse dentro al raggio
di quei vaghi occhi con li dardi sui,
né s'ammentava ancora dell'oltraggio
detto davanti de' servi di lui;
né dello strale, il quale al cor gli corse,
finché nol punse daddover, s'accorse. (32)

(Nor did he, who was so wise a little before
in rebuking others, perceive that Love with his
darts dwelt inside the rays of those beautiful eyes,
nor yet did he recall the outrageous things he
had said before to his servants, nor did he notice
the arrow which ran to his heart until it stung
him thoroughly; 33.)[52]

Just as in the case of Florio and Biancifiore, Troilo seems to have no choice in the matter of loving or not loving Criseida. Indeed, it seems that an outside force (Love, Venus) causes him to fall hopelessly in love to spite him for having made fun of other lovers just before he sees Criseida at the beginning of the *Filostrato*.

[51] All citations from the *Filocolo* in Italian are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1967), vol. 1; all English translations are from Boccaccio, *Il filocolo*, trans. Donald Cheney, with an introduction by Thomas G. Bergin (New York: Garland, 1985).
[52] All citations from the *Filostrato* in Italian and English are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il filostrato*, trans. Robert P. apRoberts and Anna Bruni Seldis (New York: Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 1986).

In a conventional romance, especially in Chrétien's *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, rather than serve as a hindrance, love, especially adulterous love, serves as both inspiration for the romance hero and a catalyst for the plot of his story. Likewise, in the *Filostrato* and the *Filocolo*, love serves to inspire the hero and move the plot, in the case of Troilo leading to death, while in the case of Florio leading to marriage. In general, the heroes of Boccaccio's romances, like those of Chrétien's, accept their understood duty to contemplate the beloved ceaselessly.[53]

However, while the *Lancelot* narrator revels voyeuristically in the great pleasure Lancelot and Guinevere derive from their lovemaking, the *Filocolo* narrator condemns the relative lack of self-control Florio and Biancifiore display when confronted by Love, and then domesticates this problematic eroticism in having them marry. Thus a difference between the earlier romances of Chrétien and those of Boccaccio emerges: while Chrétien celebrates adulterous love, in his romances Boccaccio either domesticates love within marriage, or punishes adulterous love and desire. An example of this difference can be found in Chrétien's *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, where Lancelot's adulterous love affair with the young queen is portrayed in a positive light, while his *Erec and Enide* ironically reveals what happens when a husband loves and desires his *wife* too much. Let us consider the second example first. At the beginning of his romance, Erec is a groom seemingly unable to end the honeymoon:

[53] In *Lancelot: Knight of the Cart*, D. D. R. Owen notes, referring to Lancelot, "It was the lover's duty to

Mes tant l'ama Erec d'amors,
Que d'armes mes ne li chaloit,
Ne a tornoiemant n'aloit.
A sa fame volt dosnoier,
Si an fist s'amie et sa drue.
En li mise s'antendue,
En acoler et an beisier,
Ne se queroit d'el aesier.
Si conpaignon duel en avoient,
Sovant entr'ax se demantoient
De ce que trop l'amoit assez.[54]

(But Erec was so in love with her that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments. He no longer cared for tourneying; he wanted to enjoy his wife's company, and he made her his lady and his mistress. He turned all his attention to embracing and kissing her; he pursued no other delight. His companions were grieved by this and often lamented among themselves, saying that he loved her far too much.[55])

Excessive love within marriage runs counter to the ideal in traditional romance because it leads to an inactive hero. The result is that Erec, feeling so ashamed at having disregarded his knightly duties, voluntarily participates in the brutality of the "Joy of the Court" in order to regain his honor among the great knights around Arthur's legendary table. In this episode, Erec, ignoring the pleas of everyone around him to avoid this adventure, enters a magic garden containing luscious fruit, beautiful and pleasant animals, and marvelous vegetation all year round. No knight, however, has ever successfully exited this garden because of a huge and terrible knight in red armor who guards the garden and his lady who resides there as well. His lady has forbidden the knight to leave the garden until he is vanquished by another, as she wishes to keep him

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reflect on his beloved at all times," 512.

with her at all times. Until Erec arrives and succeeds in this task, the knight remains a prisoner in this garden, as no other knight before Erec had been able to successfully challenge him. Once it is clear that Erec has succeeded, the knight thanks him, for he is now free to leave the garden. In this way, Erec is able to redeem himself in the eyes of his fellow knights, and we learn the lesson that withdrawal from society into an exclusive world of love must be avoided as it can only lead to disaster. Had Enide been his lover, no problem would have existed. Rather than staying at home to be with her, Erec would have been out trying to prove himself worthy of her.

By contrast, in *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, the narrator seems to delight in the moment depicting the adulterous lovemaking of Lancelot and Guinevere:

> Et la reïne li estant
> Ses bras ancontre, si l'anbrace,
> Estroit pres de son piz le lace,
> Si l'a lez li an son lit tret,
> Et plus bel sanblant li fet
> Que ele onques feire li puet,
> Que d'Amors et del cuer li muet.
> D'Amors vient qu'ele le conjot;
> Et s'ele a lui grant amor ot
> Et il cent mile tanz a li,
> Car a toz autres cuers failli
> Amors avers qu'au suen ne fist;
> Mes an son cuer tote reprist
> Amors, et fu si anterine
> Qu'an toz autres cuers fu frarine.
> Or a Lanceloz quan qu'il vialt
> Quant la reïne an gré requialt
> Sa conpaignie et son solaz,
> Quant il la tient antre ses braz

[54] Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes,* 61.
[55] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide,* in *Arthurian Romances,* 67.

Et ele lui antre les suens.
Tant li est ses jeus dolz et buens,
Et del beisier, et del santir,
Que il or avint sanz mantir
Une joie et une mervoille
Tel c'onques ancor sa paroille
Ne fu oïe ne seűe;
Mez toz jorz iert par moi teűe,
Qu'an conte ne doit estre dite.
Des joies fu la plus eslite
Et la plus delitable cele
Que li contes nos test et cele.[56]

(The queen stretched out her arms towards him, embraced him, clasped him to her breast, and drew him into the bed beside her, showing him all the love she could, inspired by her heartfelt love. But if her love for him was strong, he felt a hundred thousand times more for her. Love in the hearts of others was as nothing compared with the love he felt in his. Love had taken root in his heart, and was so entirely there that little was left over for other hearts.
Now Lancelot had his every wish: the queen willingly sought his company and affection, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth the two of them felt a joy and wonder the equal of which has never been heard or known. But I shall let it remain a secret for ever, since it should not be written of: the most delightful and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted at, but never told.[57])

Not only does the narrator at this moment fail to allude to the couple's betrayal of Arthur, but he seems so enthralled by the love scene that we fall captive to its beauty and are thus allowed to forget about its illegitimacy.

By contrast, in the *Filocolo*, when the hero finally arrives at the tower where the Admiral is holding Biancifiore captive (Book 4), the narrator reveals details of the love

[56] Chrétien de Troyes, *Œuvres complètes*, 622.

scene that occurs at the couple's reunion so intimate that it reads more like a violation of their privacy than a celebration of their tender and long-awaited reunion:

> Egli la scuopre e con amoroso occhio rimira il dilicato petto, e con disiderosa mano tocca le ritonde menne, baciandole molte volte. Egli distende le mani per le segrete parti, le quali mai amore ne' semplici anni gli avea fatte conoscere, e toccando perviene infino a quel luogo ove ogni dolcezza si richiude: e così toccando le dilicate parti, tanto diletto prende, che gli pare *trapassare* di letizia le regioni degl'iddii; e *oltre modo disidera* che Biancifiore più non dorma e a destarla non ardisce, anzi con sommessa voce la chiama e tal volta strignendolasi più al petto s'ingegna di fare che ella si desti. (504-506)
>
> (He uncovered her and looked with loving eye at her tender bosom, and with a longing hand touched her rounded breasts, kissing them many times. He reached his hands into her private parts, which love had never let him know in his more simple years, and as he touched them he finally came to that place where all sweetness is enclosed; and touching her tender parts in this way he took such delight that his happiness seemed to *exceed* the realms of the gods. *And he longed exceedingly* that Biancifiore should sleep no longer, and he did not dare to awaken her but rather clutched her closer to his breast and tried to act so that she would wake; 337-338, my emphasis.)

Rather than being a tender love scene, this reads more like erotica. And when the narrator uses words and phrases such as *trapassare* (exceed, trespass) and *oltre modo* (beyond measure, exceedingly), it appears as if he points out their sin to us rather than the beauty of the moment, thus judging the lovers rather than appreciating the warmth and tenderness of their long-awaited reunion. In Boccaccio's romance, then, the sex is

[57] Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot: Knight of the Cart*, in *Arthurian Romances*, 264-5.

explicit and tantalizing, but the narrative voice seems to bid us question the lovers' incontinence rather than delight in their pleasure. Significantly, while the Boccaccio of romance appears somewhat ambivalent about graphic sexuality, the later Boccaccio of the *Decameron* will revel in it.

When Boccaccio differs from Chrétien de Troyes in his treatment of love and desire in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*—in the former love leads to domestic bliss in the guise of marriage, while in the latter love leads to betrayal and catastrophe—we find ourselves questioning the relative credibility of his two romance heroes, Florio and Troilo, because of their apparent and destructive lovesickness. In portraying these two characters as the author does, that is, as bent on the pursuit of a beloved who is inaccessible—in Biancifiore's case, because of the manipulations of Florio's father to keep the two lovers apart, and in Criseida's case, because of her own choice to rejoin her father in the Greek camp—Boccaccio self-consciously portrays a weakness of character on the part of the hero of each work inasmuch as each one blatantly puts his own desire before the interest of his respective community. As was shown above with the example of Lancelot, this particular weakness is nothing new in romance, although it seems that Chrétien, unlike Boccaccio, sides with his heroes more than stressing their duty to their communities.

Like many traditional romance writers, such as the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Boccaccio presents us with a very flawed hero. In a scene from Book IV of the *Filocolo*, the character Fiammetta may be ventriloquizing the author's own conception of romance precisely when he was at work on one:

--Parlare ci conviene contra quello che noi con disiderio seguiamo (423).
(It is necessary for us to speak against that which we follow with desire; 275.)

This pronouncement by Boccaccio's *senhal*[58] near the end of the *Filocolo* during the scene where the *questioni d'amore* are discussed (IV.43) provides at least some evidence as to how Boccaccio viewed the hero of his early romances as opposed to how he viewed the typical hero of a *novella* later in his *Decameron*. For, in pointing precisely to the recklessness associated with following desire blindly, the author via Fiammetta (Boccaccio's *nome segno*) deliberately discredits one of the driving forces of romance of his day, that is, the unbridled libido. No matter what heroic deeds Florio and Troilo happen to perform during the course of their adventures, the objects of their quests are clearly the objects of their desire, and therefore, their heroism is somewhat diminished. While it is true that Lancelot, like Florio and Troilo, clearly pursues the object of his desire, he is able to manage simultaneously to retain his allegiance to king and community. Generally, Lancelot is able to love and fight, whereas Florio's sole preoccupation, at least throughout Books 2, 3, and 4, is chasing after Biancifiore, and Troilo ultimately meets an untimely death because of his obsessive love for Criseida.

In general, then, Boccaccio displays less sympathy for his lovesick heroes than Chrétien does. In the *Filocolo,* for example, when the King and Queen are made aware that Florio has been distracted from his religious study by his love for Biancifiore, the

[58] In Old Provençal poems, a *senhal* was a fanciful name used for ladies, patrons, or friends, who for the most part remained anonymous. For this definition, I rely upon the entry in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 761.

King reveals his plan to Florio to send him away from the kingdom to study in Montoro. Florio desperately seeks to convince his father to keep him at home:

> Io non posso fare che io non mi vi scuopra: egli è qui nella nostra reale casa la nobile Biancifiore, la quale io sopra tutte le cose del mondo amo; e certo non sanza cagione: ella è l'ultimo fine de' miei disii, e solamente vedere il suo bel viso, il quale più che matutina stella risplende, è quello che io disidero di studiare. Onde io caramente vi priego che voi della mia vita aggiate pietà sì come padre di figliuolo, la quale sanza fallo, dividendomi io da Biancifiore, si dividerà da me. (139)
>
> (I cannot help revealing myself to you: here in our royal household is the noble Biancifiore, whom I love above all things of this world; and certainly not without reason. She is the final goal of my desires; and merely to see her lovely face, more brilliant than the morning star, that is the study I want to pursue. And so I lovingly pray you to have pity on my life that a father should have for his son; for without fail that life, if I am separated from Biancifiore, will be separated from me; 58.)

Rather than help his case, Florio's emotional plea only succeeds in substantiating his father's belief that his son's love for Biancifiore is an unhealthy and obsessive adolescent crush. Instead of trying to reason with his father, Florio raves about Biancifiore's being "l'ultimo fine de' miei disii … quello che io disidero di studiare." Rather than persuade his father that the love the young prince and Biancifiore share for each other is positive and edifying, Florio threatens his father with a vow that he will no longer be his father's son should he be forced to separate from Biancifiore. Florio is not merely privileging love over everything, as do most romance heroes; he is completely renouncing his duty as the son of a king in order to satisfy his *disii* (desires). And in his case, following his

instinct proves fruitful. Once Florio and Biancifiore are united in marriage and love, circumstance favors the hero. First, he converts to Catholicism in Rome at the same moment he learns he has a son, little Lelio, and then he renews his relationship with his father, thus re-assuming his duties as son and prince. After his perilous adventure, then, he is suddenly spiritually converted, has an heir, regains a father, and regains his identity as prince—he is fully reintegrated into his society.

In the *Filostrato*, Troilo's lovesickness appears even more acute than Florio's inasmuch as he finds himself in the middle of a war but is unable to give it any thought because of his love for Criseida. Like Florio, Troilo is completely driven by love to accomplish whatever feats he does as prince and soldier:

> Tanto di giorno in giorno col pensiero,
> e col piacer di quello or preparava
> piú l'esca secca dentro al core altiero,
> e da' belli occhi trarre immaginava
> acqua soave al suo ardor severo;
> per che astutamente gli cercava
> sovente di veder, né s'avvedea
> che piú da quegli il foco s'accendea.
>
> Costui o qua o lá ch'el gisse, andando,
> sedendo ancora, o solo o accompagnato,
> com'el volesse, bevendo o mangiando,
> la notte e 'l giorno ed in qualunque lato,
> di Criseida sempre giá pensando;
> e 'l suo valore e 'l viso dilicato
> di lei --diceva-- avanza Pulissena
> d'ogni bellezza, e similmente Elena.
>
> Né del dí trapassava nessuna ora
> che mille volte seco non dicesse:
> --O chiara luce che 'l cor m'innamora,
> o Criseida bella, Iddio volesse

che ’l tuo valor che ’l viso mi scolora,
per me alquanto a pietá ti movesse;
null’altro fuor che tu lieto puó farmi,
tu sola se’ colei che puoi atarmi.--

Ciascun altro pensier s’era fuggito
della gran guerra e della sua salute,
e sol nel petto suo era sentito
quel che parlasse dell’alta virtute
della sua donna, e, cosí impedito,
sol di curar l’amorose ferute
sollicito era, e quivi ogni intelletto
avea posto, e l’affanno e ’l diletto.

L’aspre battaglie e gli stormi angosciosi,
ch’Ettor e gli altri suoi fratei facieno
seguiti da’ Troian, dagli amorosi
pensieri peró niente il rimovieno;
come che spesso, ne’ piú perigliosi
assalti, anzi ad ogni altro lui vedieno
mirabilmente nell’armi operare
color che stesser ció forse a mirare.

Né a ció odio de’ Greci il movea,
né vaghezza ch’avesse di vittoria
per Troia liberar, la qual vedea
stretta d’assedio, ma voglia di gloria
per piú piacer tutto questo facea;
e per amor, se ’l ver dice la storia,
divenne in arme sí feroce e forte,
che li Greci il temien come la morte. (40-42)

(So often from day to day with thinking and with the pleasure from it he prepared more dry tinder within his proud heart, and imagined that he would draw sweet water from her beautiful eyes for his intense ardor; therefore he cunningly sought to see them often, not perceiving that by them the fire was kindled more.

When he went here or there, walking or sitting, alone or accompanied, as he might wish, eating or drinking, night or day and in whatever place, he was constantly thinking about Criseida; and he said that her worth and her delicate features surpassed Polyxena in every beauty, and likewise Helen.

> Nor did an hour of the day pass that he did not say to himself a thousand times: "O clear light which fills my heart with love, O beautiful Criseida, may God will it that your worth, which deprives my face of color, may be moved to a little pity for me; no one except you can make me joyful; you alone are the woman who can help me."
>
> Every other thought, both of the great war and of his well-being, had fled and in his breast was heard only what spoke of the high virtue of his lady, and, thus encumbered, he was eager only to cure his amorous wounds, and toward this end he placed every thought, and all his suffering and his delight.
>
> The sharp battles and the bitter clashes which Hector and his other brothers made, followed by the Trojans, did not, however, turn him from his thoughts of love; although often in the most perilous assaults those who happened to be watching saw him, more than any other, work marvels in arms.
>
> Nor did hatred of the Greeks move him to this, nor the longing which he had for victory to liberate Troy, which he saw still gripped by siege, but his desire for glory to be more pleasing caused all this; and through love, if the story speaks the truth, he became so fierce and strong in arms that the Greeks feared him as they did death; 41-43.)

Rather than resembling a romance, this particular passage of the *Filostrato* reads more like a stilnovistic poem in that the beloved is able to empower the lover merely through his gazing and subsequent contemplation of her. The difference between Troilo's love for Criseida and a stilnovist's for his beloved, however, is that the former becomes carnal and then leads to his ultimate destruction, while the latter generally remains intellectual and therefore remote (as in Dante's *Vita nuova*), thus avoiding the *physical* destruction of the lover.

Once Troilo confirms that he has been betrayed by Criseida, who has taken up with Diomede, he seeks him out in battle and is slain by Achilles:

> L'ira di Troilo in tempi diversi
> a' Greci nocque molto sanza fallo,
> tanto che pochi ne gli uscieno avversi
> che non cacciasse morti del cavallo,
> sol che ei l'attendesser, sí perversi
> colpi donava; e dopo lungo stallo,
> avendone giá morti piú di mille,
> miseramente un dí l'uccise Achille. (408)
>
> (The wrath of Troilo was, without fail, at various times
> harmful to the Greeks, so much so that few came forth
> against him whom he did not hurl dead from their horses if
> only they would await him, such wicked blows he dealt, and
> after a long stalemate, Achilles one day slew him wretchedly
> after he had already killed more than a thousand; 409.)

What begins as a love affair in the *Filostrato,* one that enhances the lover's physical prowess, ends ultimately in his destruction. Troilo's lovesickness in the end proves fatal.

These examples from the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* show that Boccaccio clearly knows the elements of successful romance. The way in which his narratives treat the romance hero substantiate this fact. Rather than highlight the great deeds of his protagonists, the narratives tend to focus on their weaknesses: Florio and Troilo find themselves vulnerable to the whims of the gods; they are lovesick to the point of self-destruction; and they are unable to deploy any individual will to combat these negative circumstances. Unlike many of the clever tricksters of the *Decameron,* who prove capable of forcing *Fortuna* to favor them, Florio and Troilo are relatively passive when

facing her power. Yet, although Boccaccio portrays both of these romance heroes as inferior to *Fortuna*, Florio's efforts in the end are not futile, in the sense that he does ultimately win the object of his desire.

Romance themes and motifs from the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato* reappear in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but for Boccaccio, a *novella* generally tends to work on the basis of its protagonist's clear understanding and intentions, while the wandering text of romance relies more upon its hero's inability to overcome his circumstances and see his way out of them with the same clear-sightedness as does the hero of the *novella*. Nevertheless, there are romance elements in the *Decameron*. King Felice and the evil seneschal in the *Filocolo*, who seek to incriminate Biancifiore, may be prototypes for the Princess of France who accuses the Conte d'Anguersa of rape in *Decameron,* II, 8. Furthermore, Biancifiore's voyage in Book 4 of the *Filocolo* upon being sold into slavery by the queen re-appears as a combination of the wanderings of Alatiel (II, 7) and Zinevra/Sicurano (II, 9). Finally, the story of Troilo seems a prelude to stories of incontinent and untrustworthy women found especially in *Decameron* VII and VIII, such as Madonna Peronella (VII, 2), and Elena (VIII, 7).

Boccaccio wrote his romances in a courtly society that privileged this genre, and he wrote them with an eye on the accomplishment of his French predecessors such as Chrétien. But while the French romance tradition that Boccaccio knew regarded courtly love in a positive way, seeing it as something that could inspire and empower the romance hero, the story of Lancelot came to Boccaccio initially via Dante (in *Inferno*

V).[59] In Dante's interpretation, Lancelot's tale is not only a tragic one where the hero finds himself constantly afflicted by the contradiction of his hopeless love for Queen Guinevere, on the one hand, and his simultaneous deep devotion to her husband King Arthur, on the other, but as a cautionary tale. For Dante seems to warn us with his rendition of the story of the perilous consequences one may suffer in 1) blindly following the dictates of emotion, 2) taking narrative signs at face value, and 3) failing to consider the long-term implications of one's actions.

For the Boccaccio of the *Decameron*, while the ability to recount a good story is paramount, the ability to evade any story's persuasive invitation to imitation prevails as an equally important goal in reading and interpreting a text. That is, when presented with a sexy story in the *Decameron*, a reader must be able to act morally and with reserve, but still enjoy the pleasure that the tale provides. In choosing to highlight Lancelot as a lovesick tragic hero, Boccaccio is communicating on a number of different levels to his audience. First, he is using the identity of this well-known hero to appeal to his reader, as he is fully aware of the popularity among his reading public of both Lancelot and the French romance. Second, he knows that his audience is looking for pleasure in reading, and Lancelot's story had certainly proven itself by Boccaccio's time in this respect. Finally, in calling to mind Lancelot's story, Boccaccio makes explicit his own fears and weaknesses as a potentially seducible reader and writer, as a human being potentially

[59] Boccaccio clearly knew Dante before he read French romances. Bergin notes, regarding the composition of the *Filocolo*, "If the sources of the main narrative are in a sense 'popular,' and, as we have seen, Boccaccio drew apparently on two Old French versions of the tale as well as an Italian rhymed version in somewhat vulgar style, yet the aura of classical tradition and the music of the high style are ever with us. Nor should the indebtedness to Dante be overlooked. Not only does the episode of Idalogo remind us of

unable at times to distinguish a truth from a lie, and as a possible victim of reading passionate tales in the way that Dante's Paolo and Francesca were victims.

At the beginning of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio suggests an alternative name or title for his work, "Galehaut," which can be seen not as an enticement, but rather as a warning about imitating the deeds of famous characters. As the organizer of the tryst between Lancelot and Guinevere, Galehaut also served as a pander for Paolo and Francesca in Dante's *Inferno V*. Boccaccio's text can potentially serve as one for its reader as well, if the reader so allows. As the name of both the book containing Lancelot's adventures, and of the individual who organized Lancelot's (in)famous tryst with Queen Guinevere, Galehaut is capable of providing his willing reader with delightful but dangerous adventures. In invoking this name as an alternative title, then, Boccaccio shows that he knew romance in all of its complexity. That is, he was aware of the positive inspiration romance can provide, as well as the sexual transgression it can portray and the temptation associated with such transgression.

Indeed, when Francesca invokes the name of Galeotto in Dante's poem, she refers to the work she and Paolo were reading after which "quel giorno più non leggemmo avante" ("that day we read no more").[60] Francesca seems to invoke the pander's name with disdain and diffidence, and Boccaccio wants his reader to consider her pronouncement of this name when he provides an alternative title for his own *Decameron*:

Pier delle Vigne (as well as of Polydorus), but the prose is sprinkled with phrases clearly derived from an intensive reading of the *Vita nuova*, to say nothing of the *Comedy*," 86.

[60] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, Canto V, line 138.

> Comincia il libro chiamato << Decameron>>, cognominato Prencipe Galeotto, nel quale si contengono cento novelle, in dieci dì da sette donne e da tre giovani uomini.[61]
>
> (Here begins the book called *Decameron,* otherwise known as Prince Galahalt wherein are contained a hundred stories, told in ten days by seven women and by three young men.)[62]

The meaning of calling his book Galeotto comes clear if we look back at Boccaccio's commentary on Dante's fifth canto of the *Inferno,* for then we must acknowledge that for Boccaccio, the name *Galeotto* recalled not only the character in the romance, but the name of the romance itself, and the genre that was so popular and appealing in Boccaccio's day. By invoking this name, the author recalls the moment in *Inferno* where Francesca used it as an explanation for her presence in Hell. He could have chosen any popular romance title, but he chose the one that recounted the story of the betrayal of King Arthur by Lancelot and Guinevere, the one Francesca and Paolo were reading, according to Dante, at the moment their fate was sealed. Boccaccio lets the reader know that his book is like a romance in that it is potentially full of a variety of situations and characters, some positive and others negative. His ideal reader will not be overcome by a passion to imitate any of his fiction and then use the book as an excuse for questionable behavior. Boccaccio urges us to be responsible for our own reaction to his tales rather than using them as an excuse when we transgress, thus he uses Francesca as a negative example.

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[61] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Torino: Giulio Enaudi editore, 1987), 3.
[62] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (New York: Penguin, 1995), 1.

In addition, with his subtitle for the *Decameron*, Boccaccio seeks to remind us of yet something else. That is, when reading the *novelle* we must keep in mind that he is also a successful writer of romance, as is proven by the examples of his two early ones, the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*. In considering them, then, we must acknowledge not only their popularity in their own time and two or three centuries afterward, but also the fact that they influenced works by Chaucer, Fletcher, Shakespeare, and Keats. While he is capable of entertaining us in the *Decameron* with short, bawdy tales containing clever and quick-thinking protagonists (Cepperello/Ciappelletto in I, 1; Madama Oretta in VI, 1), Boccaccio wants us to remember that he is equally capable of ennobling us with examples of heroes who are as human and subject to the whims of *Fortuna* as those out of romance (Il conte d'Anguersa, II, 8; Griselda, X, 10).

CHAPTER 2

"Health and Recreation in Storytelling: Boccaccio's Attack on Romance, *Decameron* VI, 1"

Boccaccio's tale of Madama Oretta (*Decameron*, VI, 1) serves as a useful reminder of how wit and brevity in storytelling can please one's audience. The setting of the story, which includes a noble lady with impeccable manners and a knight on horseback, comes straight out of romance, except that the tale itself is short and succinct. Despite this discrepancy, the reader is reminded in VI, 1 of another place in Boccaccio's work where romance is evoked, but this time, by means of a well known literary name. At the very beginning of the *Decameron*, the author provides a subtitle to his work in order to warn of the risk involved in reading texts for pleasure:

> Comincia il libro chiamato <<Decameron>>, cognominato
> Prencipe Galeotto, nel quale si contengono cento novelle,
> in diece dì dette da sette donne e da tre giovani uomini. (3)
>
> (Here begins the book called Decameron, otherwise known as
> Prince Galehalt wherein are contained a hundred stories,
> told in ten days by seven ladies and three young men; 1.)

In referring to his work this way, Boccaccio brings to mind the story of how Galehalt persuaded Lancelot to meet Guinevere, which meeting led to the kiss that sealed their fate. Boccaccio brings up the same text that sealed the fates of Dante's Paolo and

Francesca to warn the reader against allowing the text to serve as a pimp. As Glending Olson puts it,

> The book's playful but pointed subtitle reminds us of the moral value of reading it maturely and critically. The *Decameron* stories may be a Galeotto, a go-between, as Dante's Francesca called the book and author she read; but unlike her, the brigata, and by implication any wise reader, will find in its tales therapeutic rather than carnal stimulation.[63]

Wise readers confronted with sexy stories in the *Decameron* will behave just as the *brigata* does, morally and with reserve—but what about pleasure? In contrasting Madama Oretta's tale with its source in the *Novellino*, I will argue that Boccaccio brings us momentarily back to the genre of romance in *Decameron* VI, 1, a genre full of, among other things, illicit sex and immorality, for specific reasons. Using the example of Madama Oretta, and by making VI, 1 one of the shortest *novelle* in the*Decameron* , the author aims to persuade the reader of the superiority of the *novella*, while he is essentially devaluing the longwinded genre of romance, full of fits and starts and false climaxes. He uses the setting and characters to evoke that genre, but implicitly rejects it in favor of the more manageable genre of the *novella*.

Recalling the narrator's own statement in the Introduction to the *Decameron*—*intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo* (8-9) ("I shall narrate a hundred stories or fables or parables or histories or whatever you

[63] Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 206.

choose to call them" [3])—his tales, or *novelle* as he prefers to call them, may seem at times to include many different genres. Boccaccio's multiplication of generic terms suggests he is doing something *new*, but since he realizes that the newness or modernity of his stories might prove startling to less adventurous readers, he urges us to call them *novelle*, or fables (*favole*), or parables (*parabole*), or histories (*istorie*), or whatever we like (*che dire le vogliamo*). In fact, VI, 1 begins as a chronicle, a mini-*istoria*, of daily life in Florence. Filomena quite straightforwardly asserts that her *novella* concerns someone of whom all of the *brigata* have heard tell, Madama Oretta, the silver-tongued wife of Geri Spina. The *istoria* then moves into the allegorical mode of a *favola* when a knight offers to take Madama Oretta *a cavallo con una delle belle novelle del mondo* (718) ("riding on horseback with one of the finest tales in the world" [447]). In the end, however, we have learned a lesson, just as we would in a *parabola*, about bad storytelling. All of this occurs against a backdrop of a scene from romance composed of knights, ladies, horses, and swordplay. The story's climax, Madama Oretta's *motto*, makes the story a *novella* insofar as Boccaccio's *novelle* focus upon the witty manipulation of others through language sometimes involving self-aggrandizing trickery and other times clear self-protection from aggression. A *novella* in this context involves, as its etymology indicates, a new thing, a moment of creation in a story, something spontaneous, a discovery.

Boccaccio's message in VI, 1 is not the same one he offered at the beginning of the work. Instead of warning his audience of the moral risks associated with reading for pleasure, an activity which leads Dante's Francesca and Paolo to their deaths, he now

says that if one is prudent and discreet, both reading and the erotic desires it can arouse, can be satisfying, fulfilling, and worthwhile experiences. Good stories, after all, potentially contain a message that encourages multiple levels of interpretation, and a good lesson, social, moral or otherwise. For Boccaccio, finally, the pleasure resulting from reading stories is valuable in that it can serve as therapy for the mind, thereby making us healthier and better individuals.

In order to substantiate these claims, besides examining the *Novellino* analogue for the Madama Oretta story, I will discuss romance as a genre of storytelling that differs from the model of the short tale advocated by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle privileges a particular kind of storytelling for its ability to ease the weary mind. Pleasure generated by a brief story restores us so that we return reinvigorated to daily labor. In Book II of the *Ethics*, Aristotle says,

> In respect of pleasantness in social amusement, the middle character is witty and the middle disposition Wittiness; the excess is Buffoonery and its possessor a buffoon; the deficient man may be called boorish, and his disposition Boorishness. In respect of general pleasantness in life, the man who is pleasant in the proper manner is friendly, and the observance of the mean is Friendliness; he that exceeds, if from no interested motive, is obsequious, if for his own advantage, a flatterer; he that is deficient, and unpleasant in all affairs of life, may be called quarrelsome and surly.[64]

[64] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 103-105.

The Aristotelian notion that reading short stories provides pleasure and is a source of physiological well-being corresponds to the medieval conception of the function of the *lai*, the *fabliau*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*—especially to VI, 1, where the main characters are either engaging in storytelling, or serving as listeners, for the purpose of making a long, arduous walk more pleasurable.

Olson and Muscatine trace the popularity of the *lai* and the *fabliau*, especially in the twelfth century, to the clerical practice of using stories in sermons to move audiences, which practice, in turn, was justified by the advice Aristotle gave in the *Ethics* As in the case of Boccaccio's readership, the audiences of the *lai* and the *fabliau* already consisted of a public ranging from the lower classes to merchants to the nobility. The rendering of the particulars of the tale depended largely upon who was listening, and the conclusions of the tales recommended that listeners take for their *intentio*, that is, to amuse and divert.

> In addition to…claiming to delight or to make people laugh, some fabliaux imply this purpose in their conclusions by bringing on personages of high social rank who function as judges of tales' actions; their responses are usually laughter and appreciation of the wit of the trick that has been recounted. It is fair to infer that such delight and laughter would contribute to one's cheerfulness, and also to infer from another fabliau's concern not to bore…that its end is the opposite of ennui, the passing of time in an entertaining way.[65]

That Boccaccio shares this intention is apparent on more than one narrative level in the *Decameron*. In the Introduction, for example, where he dedicates the work to the

"ladies," he explains that his tales are not only meant to serve his audience as helpful sources of advice as to which situations to avoid and which to pursue in the modern world, but also to serve as soothing entertainment, delivery from boredom.

> Nelle quali novelle piacevoli e aspri casi d'amore e altri fortunati avvenimenti si vederanno così ne' moderni tempi avvenuti negli antichi; delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, parimente diletto delle sollazzevoli cose in quelle mostrate e utile consiglio potranno pigliare, in quanto potranno conoscere quello che sia da fuggire e che similmente da seguitare: le quali cose senza passamento di noia non credo che possano intervenire. (9)
>
> (In these tales will be found a variety of love adventures, bitter as well as pleasing and other exciting incidents, which took place in both ancient and modern times. In reading them, the aforesaid ladies will be able to derive, not only pleasure from the entertaining matters therein set forth, but also some useful advice. For they will learn to recognize what should be avoided and likewise what should be pursued, and these things can only lead, in my opinion to the removal of their affliction; 3.)

Whereas in the Introduction to the "ladies," Boccaccio directly addresses the audience of the work, on another narrative level, the *brigata* throughout the *Decameron* proceeds to hold each tale up to be evaluated after it is told, and the terms of criticism it uses are determined (framed) by the particular member of the *brigata* reigning on the day the story is told. In the conclusion of Day IV (devoted to love affairs or relationships which ended unhappily), for instance, the king Filostrato asks forgiveness from the members of the *brigata* for having subjected them to a day of sad stories, thereby

[65] Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 136-137.

betraying their original pledge at the beginning of the work. There the *brigata* identifies their telling of tales as a response to the misery wrought by the Plague which has proven too much for their constitutions. As Dioneo proclaims in the Introduction to Day I, they will venture outside the walls of the city *a sollazzare e a ridere e a cantare* (42) ("to amuse and to laugh and to sing"). Any member of the *brigata* who violates this prime directive by telling a sad or unsuitable tale will be subjected to criticism by the others in the group.

Significantly, the story told by the knight in VI, 1 is deemed by Madama Oretta boring to the point of death. This hyperbolic suggestion of death—in reality, a bad story is not enough to cause death—strengthens the case for identifying VI, 1 with the*fabliau* tradition which has a tendency to exaggerate the plight of its characters in order to "create a shock, get a laugh," or stress a message or lesson to be learned.[66] In his analysis of the genre, R. Howard Bloch explains succinctly the distinction between the ends of romance and the ends of short tales, such as the *fabliaux*:

> Unlike romance which is continuous and in certain cases (e. g., *Perceval*) interminable, the fabliaux offer a quick fix. They are short and dirty; but they clean up their own mess, and they never leave any loose ends.[67]

Decameron VI, 1, like most of the stories told by the *brigata*, moves quickly to a climax and resolves itself. Madama Oretta wittily extracts herself from her unpleasant situation, and the knight, upon her advice, goes on to tell better stories. This story, like the *fabliau*,

[66] Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 106.

is not only designed to provide pleasure, but to thematize this idea by having the knight fail only then to be reformed by the lady's witty remark.

Finally, I will argue that the choice of Madama Oretta, a female character seemingly out of romance, to utter the first witty turn of phrase in Day VI is paradoxical and deliberate, and therefore integral to Boccaccio's pedagogical and literary agenda in the *Decameron*. Moreover, although Boccaccio draws upon some narrative devices from romance in order to appeal to his reader, and especially to women, at other points in his work, his aim in VI, 1 is to undermine that genre in favor of the *novella* in the mind of the reader. His rejection of romance creates a problem, however: how can he utilize the genre of romance in the *Decameron*, as he does, for example, on Day II, and undermine it at the same time? I will solve this problem at the end of this chapter.

The protagonist of VI, 1 is the suggestively named Madama Oretta, "Mrs. Little-hour." In keeping with her name, the tale is short, concise, and compact. The story begins following an afternoon meal at her home in Florence, when Madama Oretta finds herself on an extended walk with her guests, ladies and knights, in a rural area just outside the city. Although the reader is made aware by the storyteller, Filomena, that Madama Oretta is the wife of Messer Geri Spina, it is not clear whether her husband is in attendance. Given that one of the knights invites her to let him take her *a cavallo con una delle belle novelle del mondo* (718) ("riding on horseback with one of the finest tales in the world" [447]) for the remainder of the walk, it appears that the two are engaging in some healthy

[67] R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 127.

flirtation in the midst of the party. If her husband is present, the scene is potentially even more erotically charged, since he may be watching the exchange wondering what is going on. Elsewhere in the *Decameron* (Peronella in VII, 2 and Zeppa and Spinelloccio in VIII, 8), characters have sex with others in the presence of their spouses. In this way, not only is the excitement augmented, but so is the comic relief of the story.

The metaphor of horseback riding functions on different levels. Literally, the reader wonders if the knight is riding on horseback, while Madama Oretta walks, as one medieval illuminator portrays the scene.[68] Figuratively, thanks to Madama Oretta's statement at the end of her tale, we imagine the knight's narrative in terms of a horse's trot, which ultimately proves too rough for Madama Oretta'a taste. His rough-trotting-of-a-horse narrative does not appeal to her. Finally, given the conventional analogy between riding horses and having sex, an analogy that appears in the *Decameron* (see, for example, VII, 2 where Peronella's lover mounts her *in quella guisa che negli ampi campi gli sfrenati cavalla e d'amor caldi le cavalla di Partia assaliscono* (804) ("in the manner of a wild and hot-blooded stallion mounting a Parthian mare in the open fields" [494]) as well as in other stories from the Middle Ages, we can imagine that the knight is inviting Madama Oretta to climb upon him for the purpose of a sexual encounter. There is a striking detail here, however, for the knight's invitation is actually an inversion of the traditional hierarchical relationship of men and women in the Middle Ages in which the man occupied the superior position. In her essay, "Women on Top," Natalie Davis makes a case for the widespread nature of this *topos*, not only in texts but in art as well, and

describes it as a commonplace from ancient times up through the Renaissance.[69] Henri d'Andeli's *Lai d'Aristote* (ca. 1242) offers an illustration of this *topos*, which uses the equestrian metaphor:

> The *Lai d'Aristote* show the dour philosopher made to fall in love with his pupil, King Alexander's beautiful mistress. The triumph of sexuality over philosophy is celebrated by her saddling him and riding him through the garden.[70]

Rather than undermine philosophy's place in regard to sexuality in the cosmos, as the *Lai d'Aristote* does, Boccaccio uses the formula of woman-on-top in order to bring down the knight, the member of a class that was perhaps on its way to losing some of its prestige at this time.

The setting of *Decameron* VI, 1 is courtly, and its characters, the ladies and knights, could serve as principal ingredients for a scene from romance. The setting for *Novellino* LXXXIX, the source for *Decameron* VI, 1, is a dinner attended by knights only, which takes place at a grand Florentine palace. The narrator calls the group of diners a *Brigata di cavalieri*, and refers specifically to one of the group, a courtly man, as a *grandissimo favellatore*.[71] Once the all-male group has finished dinner, this man begins to tell a tale, a *novella*, which does not amount to much. The*Novellino* story then casts a

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[68] Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1956), 167. The illumination is captioned *Madonna Oretta e il cavaliere che mal novellava* (VI, 1). The manuscript is Cod. Parig. It. 63 and dates from 1427. Branca claims that this is the most amply illustrated Decameron manuscript.
[69] Natalie Davis, "Women on Top," in *The Reversible World*, ed. Barbara Babcock Abraham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 147-190.
[70] Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 14; my emphasis.

young man, *un donzello*, of the house who is serving dinner in the role of provider-of-corrective to the failing storyteller. The young man calls the storyteller by name and advises him that whoever taught him this tale, did not teach him to tell it in its entirety, *Perchè non t'insegnò arrestata* (98), because he did not teach him how to stop it. The courtly man takes the advice from the young man without hesitation, re-seating himself shamefacedly.

Madama Oretta's knight-storyteller likewise proceeds to recount a story without success. The narrative of VI, 1, however, provides a more detailed description of the weaknesses of the story than did the *Novellino* narrative.[71] In VI, 1, the knight-storyteller repeats particular words, three, four, and sometimes six times. He starts over several times. At times, he interrupts himself in order to assert that he is not telling the story well. He mixes up the names of his illustrious characters, mistaking one for another, and fails to narrate in a stylistic register appropriate to their loftiness. Listening to the mess that the knight has made of his tale causes Madama Oretta to sweat profusely and experience palpitations, to the extent that she feels as if she is about to die. No longer able to tolerate his verbal clumsiness, she politely asks him to let her down, metaphorically speaking, from his jerkily-trotting-horse-of-a-tale. The knight in *Decameron* VI, 1, a much more capable reader than storyteller, immediately understands the pun Madama Oretta employs in order to correct his failure. In speaking of a "horse that trots too roughly" for her delicate constitution, she is criticizing, in essence, his rendering of the story. He realizes that she has skillfully and charmingly managed to rebuke his failure with subtlety and

[71] *Novellino*, ed. Giorgio Manganelli (Milano: Rizzoli, 1957), 98. All future citations to the *Novellino* are to

wit. He accepts her criticism, "lets her down," and proceeds to try his hand at other stories, without ever finishing the one he had started to tell her.

In comparing the *Novellino* source story to Boccaccio's *Decameron* VI, 1, I note the following differences, all of which work to undermine romance in the eyes of the reader. First, Boccaccio changes the gender, from young male page to genteel lady, of the person who delivers the witty rejoinder. Second, in the *Novellino* tale, the knight is called by name by the young page who remains nameless. And third, in the *Novellino* tale, no details are given as to why the knight's story is so bad, whereas Boccaccio's tale provides an itemized list of narrative problems in the knight's story. This list of problems can be seen as corresponding to narrative conventions in romance. Fourth, we are made aware that the knight is telling the story so badly that Madama Oretta is sick, her heart is skipping beats, and she is about to die. Finally, while the *Novellino* story offers a stark portrait of knights, page and dinner, *Decameron* VI, 1 comes replete with the images of horse-riding and swordplay. All of the embellishments that Boccaccio adds to the *Novellino* version, though, can be seen as deriving from the very first change he makes, that is, the change from male to female of the character who utters the *motto*.

Boccaccio's change heightens one's sense that a social inversion is taking place, one that is, to be sure, also present in the *Novellino*. Although the page serving dinner there could be a young knight in training, and therefore a future equal to the storyteller, at the moment he does occupy a lower station in society than does the latter. Nevertheless, the young man without hesitation rebukes the knight, his superior. Furthermore, the

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this edition.

knight takes the advice and sits down. Madama Oretta, a genteel and noble lady with impeccable manners, potentially occupies a higher position socially than does the knight, but as a female, she would have naturally submitted to male authority in a patriarchal society, much as Boccaccio, who was a commoner, must have had to submit to the authority of his noble patrons in Naples or to defer to members of the mercantile élite in Florence. Revealingly, on more than one occasion in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio finds himself not only catering to, but identifying with "ladies." In his Introduction, for instance, he dedicates the whole work to them, and in the *brigata*, there are seven women and only three men.

The importance of women in Day VI is not only evident in the tales themselves, but in the frame as well, where, at the start of the day, the servants Licisca and Tindaro argue in the presence of the *brigata* over whether women go the marriage bed with or without previous sexual experiences. Tindaro argues that most brides, and in particular the wife of his friend Sicofante, are virgins. Licisca vehemently denies this fact both in the case of Sicofante's wife, whom Licisca knows very well, and in the case of most young women (*pulcelle,* 715) from her neighborhood. In the interest of ending this heated debate in order to get on with the storytelling of the *brigata*, Elissa, the queen for the day, calls upon Dioneo to make a ruling. Significantly, Dioneo decides without hesitation in favor of Licisca's opinion. This scene, in which a woman's voice drowns out that of her male opponent, and which is most certainly on the minds of the storytellers throughout the day, immediately precedes Filomena's tale of Madama Oretta.

For Boccaccio, were Madama Oretta a woman in a romance, she would traditionally be portrayed as passive, silent, and nameless. For example, in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide*, one of Arthur's worthiest knights, Erec, chooses a bride who, although from a poor family, is nevertheless described as, *bele…bien senee…saige…de franc coraige*[72] ("beautiful…[possessing] good sense…wise…noble in spirit"[73]). Yet, for all her excellence, her name is not revealed to the reader until line 2031, approximately one third of the way into the story. Furthermore, when she finally speaks, between lines 2530 and 2540, she warns her husband of harmful gossip circulating within the court regarding his laziness since he married her. Rather than receive her news well, learn from it, and seek to repair his reputation, as does the knight in Madama Oretta's tale, Erec subjects his beloved to a harrowing voyage of nightmarish encounters during which he rashly demonstrates his knightly valor, and claims to teach her a lesson at the same time.

The lesson Enide should learn from her husband's punishment of her speaking is that she is only to do so when doing so serves to aggrandize his character. The trials through which Erec puts his wife in order to punish her appear cruel, exaggerated, unnecessary, and grotesque demonstrations of the dominance of the powerful knight. The portrayal of Erec in this romance shows how this genre seeks to emphasize the fantastic and grotesque, features against which Boccaccio reacts with Madama Oretta's tale.

Boccaccio subverts the order of romance (and the traditional social order romance validates) by giving the woman, one not of noble birth, the power to speak. It is probably significant that she is from a newly emerging, upwardly mobile, well-educated merchant

[72] Chrétien de Troyes, *Œvres completes*, ed. Daniel Poiron (Quetigny: Gallimard, 1994), 14-15.

class. Boccaccio replaces the nameless young man serving dinner in the *Novellino* with Madama Oretta in the *Decameron*, a woman so genteel, clever and well spoken, *il cui valore non meritò che il suo nome taccia* (718) ("whose excellence was such that she deserves to be mentioned by name" [447]). By self-consciously revealing the lady's name and by claiming that she is so worthy she does not deserve to have her name silenced, Boccaccio openly makes a gibe at the presentation of women in romance. Moreover, in the end, it is the knight who remains nameless in the tale from the *Decameron*, and it is he who accedes to the lady's daring request to let her off his horse. Recall here that in the *Novellino* story, the knight was called by the nameless page serving dinner: *Uno donzello della casa, che servia…lo chiamò per nome* (98). Clearly naming, or not naming, dictates consequences regarding the stature of the characters in a story.

A knight from a romance surely would not have taken Madama Oretta's advice well, as the knight in VI, 1 did. In fact, not only would her name be withheld from the reader for a good deal of the story, but she would not have spoken so ironically to a knight seeking to court her for fear of some cruel punishment. Furthermore, traditionally, a popular Florentine woman and wife of a banker would not have been cast as a woman in a romance. Romance is populated by remote and legendary figures of noble birth, dwarfs, giants, witches and wizards. What is Boccaccio trying to achieve by putting quick and witty remarks into the mouth of such a woman, and then having her knightly companion accept them with a sense of humor?

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[73] Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler [*Erec and Enide*, trans. Carleton W. Carroll] (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 43.

Critics generally read the tale of Madama Oretta on three different levels: first, as a brief vignette about courtly culture and chivalry; second, as an allegory of storytelling; and third, as an allegory of a sexual encounter.[74] Scholars tend to gloss its contents quickly in order to move on to the weightier tales of Day VI. However, Guido Almansi makes a vital observation about VI, 1 in pointing out its central position in the *Decameron*, the fifty-first story out of one hundred. According to Almansi, the central position of the tale signals that it contains "a coded invitation to approach the whole book in a special way."[75] Almansi provides us with much needed insight into how to read Madama Oretta's tale and, for that matter, all of the tales of Day VI as well as the rest of the *Decameron*. By revisiting Boccaccio's source story for Madama Oretta's tale, Novellino LXXXIX, it is clear that, far from providing merely a "delightful miniature which offers a momentary glimpse into the aristocratic life,"[76] her tale provides invaluable advice which helps readers to become astute *inteditori* and *novellatori*, skillful readers and tellers of tales.

Specifically, one of Boccaccio's principal objectives in the *Decameron*, and especially in Day VI, is to discredit the longwinded, never-ending genre of romance for its failure to provide a truly pleasurable, and therefore therapeutic, reading experience. In Madama Oretta's tale, in contrast to the *Novellino* story, the narrator provides details as to how the knight manages to ruin his fine tale:

[74] For an overview of the critics' treatment of Day VI, see Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 21.
[75] Ibid., 20; Almansi's emphasis.

> egli or tre e quatro e sei volte replicando una medesima parola e ora indietro tornando e talvolta dicendo: 'Io non dissi bene' e spesso ne' nomi errando, un per altro ponendone, fieramente la guastava: senza che egli pessimamente, secondo le qualità delle persone e gli atti che accadevano, profereva. (718-19)
>
> (by constantly repeating the same phrases, and recapitulating sections of the plot, and every so often declaring that he had 'made a mess of that bit', and regularly confusing names of characters, he ruined it completely. Moreover, his mode of delivery was totally out of keeping with characters and the incidents he was describing; 447.)

As the narrator of VI, 1 describes the situation, instead of providing a succession of facts, the knight often repeats words several times, and sometimes goes back to cover part of the story he has already told. Further, the knight is a self-conscious narrator, assessing his performance negatively to his audience in the middle of the story. The knight completely destroys what was truly a fine story, *la quale nel vero da sé era bellissima* (718) ("which in itself was indeed excellent" [447]), in mixing up the names of his characters, who, because of their qualities, merited the loftiest rhetorical style. All of these narrative twists and turns are portrayed as the direct cause for Madama Oretta's physical suffering, and all of them can be found in romance.

For example, in Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*, in order to punish his wife for informing him of the gossip at court concerning him, Erec subjects her to repeated trials, making her wander aimlessly through the countryside without a destination, while he slays giants, battles fierce dwarfs, and falls unconscious while another knight marries

[76] Ibid., 21. Almansi quotes and translates Carlo Muscetta, *Storia della letteratura italiana: Il Trecento*

Enide. King Arthur makes a camp and tries to persuade Erec to join his court again, but Erec stubbornly refuses. He must continue on his excessive and repetitive journey until he can forgive what he sees as Enide's sin against him. Like the knight in *Decameron* VI, 1, Erec repeats acts over and over again, at times backtracking. Moreover, like the knight in *Decameron* VI, 1, Chrétien constantly interjects his narrative voice into the story. Most of his comments are questions addressed to the reader as to why a certain character performs a certain act. Sometimes he inquires as to whether the reader thinks that the narrator has related the tale satisfactorily. Chrétien will insert "Why?" "Why not?" and "What more can I say?" liberally throughout his story, just as the knight in VI, 1 comments that he is not rendering his story well, thus similarly disrupting the flow of the narrative. Boccaccio is attacking the self-conscious author of romance for impairing the aesthetic—and psychological—satisfaction storytelling can provide.

Boccaccio here advocates the more economical and pleasurable genre of the *novella* as the corrective to romance, a courtly and aristocratic genre, overflowing with words and episodes, where the reader witnesses damsels-in-distress awaiting savior-knights, and experiences one climax after another in fits and starts. Clearly, when Filomena, the storyteller of VI, 1, proclaims the beauty and praiseworthiness of *i leggiadri motti* (717) ("shafts of wit" [446]), which are brief and small, and therefore, by association, fit women better than men, she is pointing to the superiority of women over men, a theme that runs counter to the ideology both of the romance and of Boccaccio's

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(Milano: Garzanti, 1965), 436.

society. Boccaccio justifies his preference through the example of Madama Oretta, who cleverly rebukes the knight for rendering horribly a perfectly fine story.

In response to the knight's bad storytelling—and implicitly, to the narrative style of romance—Madama Oretta becomes sick. Her symptoms arise suddenly and are comically exaggerated. In one moment, the narrator is describing the verbal quandary of the knight, and in the very next moment, Madama Oretta's physical reaction:

> Di che a madonna Oretta, udendolo, spesse volte veniva un sudore e uno sfinimento di cuore, come se inferma fosse stata per terminare; la qual cosa poi che più sofferir non poté, conoscendo che il cavaliere era entrato nel pecoreccio né era per riuscirne. (719)
>
> (She began to perspire freely, and her heart missed several beats, as though she had fallen ill and was about to give up the ghost. And in the end, when she could endure it no longer, having perceived that the knight had tied himself inextricably in knots; 447.)

The narrator leaves no doubt as to the cause of Madama Oretta's speedy and violent physical reaction. It is precisely upon hearing him, *udendolo* (719), that she breaks into a sweat, after which her heart begins to skip beats. She becomes so ill listening to this story that she feels herself on the verge of death. As it is the "hearing" of the story that initiates her condition, so it is her "knowing" (*conoscendo*) that the knight cannot escape this shameful situation that leads her to make the daring request to be let off his horse. In presenting Madama Oretta's disturbed state of mind, and illness, Boccaccio invokes the medieval tradition of storytelling as healthy and diverting pleasure for the overwrought mind.

Glending Olson traces a belief in the justification of comic stories in the Middle Ages as a potent curative for the overworked, and consequently downtrodden, intellect back through Aquinas to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Olson identifies this justification as involving the belief that the practice of storytelling, which was psychologically diverting, and therefore, physiologically soothing, was a healthy and necessary recreational activity. Laughter—felicity—from this point of view served to relax the mind from the stress of constant contemplation and other serious affairs, which were seen as requiring an excess of bodily energy, and therefore as damaging to healthy bodily functions. This expenditure could be corrected, according to Aquinas, through allowing the mind a reasonable amount of felicity. Here, Olson quotes Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle:

> But amusement does not have an aspect of good inasmuch as it is useful for human living. As man sometimes needs to give his body rest from labors, so also he sometimes needs to rest his soul from mental strain that ensues from his application to serious affairs. This is done by amusement. For this reason Aristotle says that, since there should be some relaxation for man from the anxieties and cares of human living and social intercourse by means of amusement—thus amusement has an aspect of useful good—it follows that in amusement there can be a certain agreeable association of men with one another, so they may say and Hear such things as are proper and in the proper way.[77]

[77] Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 96: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O. P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964) I: 368.

The need for psychological well-being justifies an appropriate amount of entertainment for both Aristotle and Aquinas. Witty stories and jokes—witticisms in general—can lead to a more healthy and productive existence:

> Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing a mean, a proper degree of interest in amusement, from two extremes: the excessive desire to create laughter (buffoonery), and the excessive harshness in those "who are not mellowed by amusing recreation" (boorishness). The mean is the virtue of *eutrapelia*, wittiness. This moral virtue, one of those concerned with words and actions in social relationships (outlined in *Ethics* II, 7), reveals itself not only in the moderate frequency with which one takes amusement but also in the nature of one's subjects and language…It is certainly possible that Aquinas's discussion of the virtue of *eutrapelia* implicitly includes storytelling.[78]

Following this formula, the knight in VI, 1 embodies the excess of boorishness in his incapacity to tell the tale wittily, and Madama Oretta brings both him and herself out of the realm of boorishness to *eutrapelia* in delivering her *motto*. The knight is responsible for the excess, and Madama Oretta is its victim. However, when she utters her *leggiadro motto*, in order to ask the knight to let her out of his *pecoreccio* (719), his thicket of junipers, she is trying to find her way back to the healthy and balanced state of mind normally produced by *eutrapelia*. Moreover, in the same way that Madama Oretta's capacity to respond with wittiness serves to cure her own sudden and violent illness, it also serves to lighten the heart of the knight, a literary character traditionally associated

[78] Ibid., 96-7.

with all sorts of excess. Thus her *motto*, accepted cheerfully by the knight, "cures" him, and he goes on to tell stories successfully, rather than seeking to pillage, rape, plunder, conquer, and quest—that is, engage in the excesses commonly associated with chivalry.

That the knight exceeds the boundaries of good taste and takes a victim, Madama Oretta, along for the ride can be argued on the basis of the language of desire employed by both characters in their conversation, as well as on the basis of the language of the narrative which provides a background for their exchange, for that language spills over with words and images from chivalric romance. The conversation, initiated by the knight and terminated by Madama Oretta, consists of three emotionally charged sentences, remarkable for expressions of desire through the use of verb phrases such as *volere* (to want, desire) *pregare molto* (to pray, beseech), and *piacervi* (to please). The dialogue is as follows:

Cavaliere:	"Madonna Oretta, quando voi *vogliate*, io vi porterò, gran parte della via che ad andare abbiamo, a cavallo con una delle belle novelle del mondo."
Madama Oretta:	"Messere, anzi ve ne *priego* io molto, e sarammi carissimo."
Madama Oretta:	"Messere, questo vostro cavallo ha troppo duro trotto, per che io vi *priego* che *vi piaccia* di pormi a piè" (718-19, my emphasis)
(Knight:	"Madonna Oretta, if you *like* I shall take you riding along a goodly stretch of our journey by telling you one of the finest tales in the world."
Madama Oretta:	"Sir, I *beseech* you most earnestly to do so,

and I shall look upon it as a great favour."

Madama Oretta: "Sir, you have taken me riding on a horse that trots very jerkily. *Pray* be good enough to set me down;" 447.)

The way in which they address each other seems, at first glance, overly polite and somewhat affected—the language of polite company, of chivalric romance, and of urbanity. A closer look at their exchange, however, suggests some sort of potential for intimacy. He wants to relieve her from the drudgery of the walk on his horse with a story, "if she desires." She responds, not only agreeably, but with exaggerated, and somewhat suspect, enthusiasm. His proposition is that he will carry her on his horse, if and when she wishes. She turns his proposition around with the adverb *anzi* (718), making it seem as if she were the one, or she wishes she had been the one, to suggest this way of conducting their walk, which will be for her not only *caro*, dear, sweet, intimate, but *carissimo* (718).

She begs him, *ve ne priego io* (718), without hesitation and unabashedly to act upon his proposition in the first sentence quoted from her above. Then, with equal exaggeration, after witnessing his ruined story which has made her deathly ill, she begs him yet again in her second sentence to let her off his roughly trotting horse. The two extreme emotional reactions on the part of Madama Oretta, from extreme courteousness to complete disgust, find their mean, their cure, in her witticism. Madama Oretta's genius can be identified in her ability to confront a character and a situation out of chivalric romance with words and transform it into something light and comic.

Boccaccio is himself like Madama Oretta. He writes his tales for a female audience confined to their *camere racchiuse* (7) ("locked-up rooms") who are deprived of any opportunity to venture outside and

> udire e veder molte cose, uccellare, cacciare, pescare cavalcare giucare or mercatare; de' quail modi ciascuno ha forza di trarre, o in tutto o in parte, l'animo a sé e dal noioso pensiero rimuoverlo almeno per alcuno spazio di tempo, appresso il quale, o in un modo o in un altro, o consolazion sopravviene o diventa la noia minore. (8)
>
> (see and hear many things, go fowling, hunting, fishing, riding and gambling, or attend to their business affairs. Each of these pursuits has the power of engaging men's minds, either wholly or in part, and diverting them from their gloomy meditations, at least for a certain period: after which, some form of consolation will ensue, or the affliction will grow less intense; 3.)

In order to grant women some reprieve from this desperate situation in which they find themselves daily, Boccaccio offers to divert them with one hundred tales. He proposes literature as a source of entertainment and consolation, and to provide refuge from the drudgery of needle and thread. Boccaccio proposes to use storytelling to soothe these ladies who are shut up and frustrated within their day-to-day existence behind closed doors. From the very beginning, though, he warns that they should not read his generous gift as they would read a Galehalt, that is, as an invitation to use the text to justify adultery. Boccaccio's *special invitation* to his readership is to learn to distinguish worthy tales from unworthy tales and exemplary characters from treacherous ones.

Madama Oretta's verbal *ingegno* serves as an important step towards this level of cultivation in that she uses wit to get the knight to discern good from bad. Going back to Olson's discussion of Aristotle and Aquinas, this capacity for wit acquired through the practice of telling short and clever stories succeeds in "mellowing the soul" (Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 96).

In privileging a model of storytelling preferred by Aristotle over the more contemporary model of romance, Boccaccio reveals not only a cultural predilection for the ancients over medieval writers, but a social one as well. Romance, after all, was an aristocratic genre whose audience was the social élite. Boccaccio's tales, by contrast, are populated with those noble by virtue of character and birth alike. Madama Oretta is described first as a citizen of Florence, second, as genteel, though not by birth, and cultivated, and third, as well spoken. In Day VI, the day devoted to witty turns of phrase, his city of choice for most of the tales is Florence. In doing so, Boccaccio seems to stake a claim for Florence as equivalent to Rome. In fact, his most successful characters—Cisti, Madonna Filippa, and Fra Cipolla—demonstrate an urbanity more akin to that of the Roman orator than to that of the knight and lady of romance.

Cicero makes suggestions in the *Ad Herennium* which commend brevity for its usefulness, and warn the orator to avoid faults we have seen are associated with romance:

> our Statement of Facts will be clear if we follow the precepts on brevity that I have laid down, for the shorter the Statement of Facts, the clearer will it be and the

> easier to follow.[79]

Furthermore, he advises,

> we must guard against saying a thing more than once, and certainly against repeating immediately what we have said already. (27)

Here we reminded of some faults in the knight's narrative, which Madama Oretta repairs in her skillful delivery of her quip. Had her reaction been delayed and reluctant, she might have added to the awkwardness of the situation. She reacts, however, quickly, with charm and urbanity, and the knight reflects this charm and urbanity in the light-hearted way he receives her criticism.

Additional support for Boccaccio's aim to promote the *novella* can be found in yet another recommendation from the *Ad Herennium* regarding the problem of holding or regaining an audience's attention:

> If the hearers have been fatigued by listening, we shall open with something that may provoke laughter—a fable, a plausible fiction, a caricature, an ironical inversion of the meaning of a word, an ambiguity, innuendo, banter, a naivety, an exaggeration, a recapitulation, a pun, an unsuspected turn, a novel tale, a historical anecdote, a verse, or a challenge or a smile of approbation directed at some one. (19-21)

[79] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 27. Although attributed to Cicero in the Middle Ages, by the early sixteenth century, the improbability of Ciceronian authorship had been revealed. Boccaccio and his contemporaries would have considered it a Ciceronian text. For a discussion of this problem, see John O. Ward, "Quintilian and the Rhetorical Revolution of the Middle Ages," *Rhetorica* XIII (1995), 231-84.

As in the passage from the *Ethics*, the problem here has to do with correcting a problematic physical condition, that is, mental fatigue resulting from listening to a long speech. The suggested cure for this physical condition is diversion of the mind through, among other things, storytelling, the telling of a "novel tale," a *novitas*.

In the passage from *Novellino* LXXXIX to *Decameron* VI, 1 Boccaccio begins his transformation of the story by changing the gender of the protagonist from male to female. He proceeds to name her "Mrs. Little-hour," suggesting that even though she appears to be a character out of romance, her tale will not continue on past a reasonable limit as romance narratives tend to do. Furthermore, Boccaccio does not name his knight but has him tell a story whose narrative faults correspond to the conventions of romance, and which makes Madama Oretta literally ill. In the *Novellino* story, the knight sits down shamefacedly after he is unable to perform effectively, and the story then ends abruptly. Madama Oretta's story ends on a comic note: she effects her own cure through her wit and enables the knight to go on to try his hand at other stories with success.

Although in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio accepts romance and often includes its literary conventions in his narratives, he is generally critical of them and will even turn them upside down in order to demonstrate their absurdity. As Millicent Marcus points out, Boccaccio exploits those conventions of Day II, which especially emphasizes the power of fortune, but reveals his resistance to romance by showing that characters who passively succumb to fortune are inferior to those who are able to counteract unfavorable circumstances by means of their wit and thereby achieve happy endings in their stories (e.

g., Alatiel, Beritola, and Andreuccio).[80] In the tale of Madama Oretta, Boccaccio is more emphatic in his rejection of romance as he blatantly parodies its conventions, which he used in Day II, because of their potential to make us unhappy, unhealthy readers.

By placing romance in a dialectical relationship with his genre of choice, the *novella*, Boccaccio seeks to nudge the reader into believing in the superiority of the *novella*. By using romance in the various ways he does, he points to its inherent slipperiness, and perhaps to its status as a relic of another time and place, the world of the courts. Identifying with the newly emerging mercantile class, Boccaccio centers his *epopea mercantile* on a new literary genre, the *novella*. In the same way the *fabliau* served as a foil for epic and romance beginning two centuries prior to the *Decameron*, the *novella* functions quite the same way. And like the *fabliau*, some *novelle* treat of worthy people, some present bawdy tales, and some accommodate themes in between these two extremes. Boccaccio's *novelle* do not wholly abandon the conventions of the romance, but he does alter them sufficiently to make them appeal to a new literary public consisting not only of nobility, but of the middle class as well.

[80] Millicent Joy Marcus, *An Allegory of Form* (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1979), 43.

CHAPTER 3

"…*non che uno aringo ma diece.*…: The Storytelling Challenge of Day II"

Day II of the *Decameron* is the ideal place to begin examining Boccaccio's continuing indebtedness to the genre he cultivated at the start of his career as a writer. More than any other day of the *Decameron*, Day II contains stories that resemble romances.[81] Not only are they among the longest stories told during the course of the ten days, but the plots in Day II are among the most episodic and their characters find themselves most vulnerable to the whims of *Fortuna*, two conventional aspects of romance. However, while these stories are like romances, they are reproductions with a difference. While the traditional goals of romance in Boccaccio's day were lofty, communal, spiritual, and ethical, the goals of Boccaccio's romances in Day II are often material, mundane, personal, and secular.

The stories of Day II are supposed to conform to the dictate of its queen, Filomena:

> Finisce la Prima giornata del Decameron: e incomincia
> la Seconda, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Filomena,
> si ragiona di chi, da diverse cose infestato, sia oltre alla
> sua speranza riuscito a lieto fine. (129)
>
> (Here begins the Second Day, wherein, under the rule

[81] The following studies represent work done thus far on the subject of how individual novelle of Day II resemble romances: M. Bardi, "Il volto enigmatico della fortuna: II giornata," in *Prospettive* sul Decameron, ed. G. Barberi Squarotti (Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1989), 25-38; Stavros Deligiorgis, "Boccaccio and the Greek Romances," *Comparative Literature* 19 (1967): 97-113; A. Galletti, "Prefazione alla II giornata," in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. M. Bevilacqua (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1980), 93-9; N. Giannetto, "Parody in the "Decameron": A 'Contented Captive' and Dioneo," *Italianist* 1 (1981): 7-23; Gregory Lucente, "The Fortunate Fall of Andreuccio da Perugia," *Forum Italicum* 10 (1976): 323-44; Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1979), 43; C. Muscetta, *Giovanni Boccaccio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1972): 187-205; and Michelangelo Picone, "Il romanzo di Alatiel," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995): 197-217.

> of Filomena, the discussion turns upon those who after suffering a series of misfortunes are brought to a state of unexpected happiness; 115.)

Thus from the start, we are cued to expect stories that will contain a sequence of episodes (or a series of misfortunes), rather than be organized as most of the stories of Day I are, that is, as one unified action.

Indeed, in her introduction to the eighth story of the second day, Elissa implicitly re-confirms and re-states the storytelling objective of the day in referring to an *ampissimo campo*, that is, the "broad playing field" that is the text of romance with its utter and unavoidable reliance upon the whims of *Fortuna*. Before she begins her story, Elissa reminds the *brigata*,

> Ampissimo campo è quello per lo quale noi oggi spaziando andiamo, né ce n'é alcuno che, non che uno aringo ma diece non ci potesse assai leggiermente correre, sì copioso l'ha fatto la fortuna delle sue nuove e gravi cose; e per ciò, vegnendo di quelle, che infinite sono, a raccontare alcuna dico… (259)
>
> (The field through which we are roaming today is exceedingly broad, and it would be very easy for anyone to try his skill there, not only once but a dozen times, since Fortune has stocked it so abundantly with her marvels and afflictions. But to choose a single story from among the infinite number that could be narrated, I shall begin by telling you …; 191-2.)

In comparing the text of romance to a broad tournament field, Elissa recalls that on this day, the stories have been lengthy and episodic. In terms of the pages in a book, the tales of Day II of the *Decameron* fill lots of space (*oggi spaziando andiamo*), just as a romance does. In using the *campo* metaphor both to introduce the story of the Conte d'Anguersa

and to remind her companions of the task at hand, Elissa brings to mind Pampinea's earlier comparison of *leggiadri motti* to *i fiori ne' verdi prati nella primavera* (116) just before she tells the last story of Day I, the story of Maestro Alberto of Bologna. While the imagery deployed by Elissa is more specialized than that used by Pampinea, both are comparing the act of storytelling to covering large spaces. The difference between the two metaphors focuses our attention on the difference between the two days of storytelling. In replacing *prato*, meadow, with *campo*, playing field, and by referring to an individual attempt at storytelling as an *aringo*, a play on the tournament field, rather than as *fiori*, flowers, Elissa evokes the world of knights and tournaments, the world of romance. Pampinea's different metaphor thus sets up an implicit contrast between the *novella* and the long-winded romance. Specifically, in Pampinea's metaphor, storytelling is compared to walks through a meadow, a natural, uncontrived space. In Elissa's metaphor of the *campo*, storytelling is still conceived of spatially, and additionally as the multitude of individual plays (*aringhi*) conducted on large plots of land demarcated and set aside by humans in order to engage in organized recreational activity. While Pampinea's initial metaphor might have hinted at the trouble with storytelling larger than big meadows where we take walks, Elissa's makes plain the fact that Day II is a day for just such stories. And in bringing to mind the tournament field, a space where knights traditionally jousted to become champions, she cues us to expect romance with all of its inherent challenges. Although the primary objective of the storytellers of the *Decameron* is to tell the most entertaining tale of the day, this challenge is hinted at here; it only becomes fully operational in Day X.

Boccaccio's treatment of romance in Day II is favorable in some stories and less so in others, yet each *novella* on this day can be seen as having drawn on some aspect of the romance tradition, and all except for one (II, 10) adhere to the threefold structure of romance suggested by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. Nevertheless, the stories scarcely reveal a univocal view of romance on the part of the author. While Alessandro, the Conte d'Anguersa, and Zinevra prove convincing heroes, Martellino, Rinaldo d'Asti, Landolfo Rufolo, and Andreuccio da Perugia tend to be questionable romance ones. While some of the stories of Day II present romances in the spirit in which they were traditionally intended, others parody the romance as a genre. Moreover, Boccaccio flanks the stories of Day II with two divergent examples of characters, Maestro Alberto (I, 10) and Messer Ricciardo di Chinzica (II, 10), the former being able to escape the trappings of romance, the latter unable. In between these two are nine romances, and while some are more conventional than others in that they evoke romance by touting its values intertextually, they all appeal to us to see life not in terms of single moments, but rather as a whole, a contiuum. And although Dioneo ends the day with an ironic version of the threefold structure, the genre continues to pervade the *Decameron* from this day forward. It is as if the *brigata* on Day II has opened a Pandora's box, and despite Dioneo's best efforts, they are unable to re-seal it.

In introducing the opposition between *leggiadri motti* and *il molto parlare e lungo* (116) in one particular passage just before telling the story of Maestro Alberto (I, 10), Pampinea provides a negative contrast for the lengthy stories that will follow in Day II.

In the *novella* that she tells, an older man cures himself of lovesickness for a younger woman through a clever turn of phrase. Pampinea's tale of Maestro Alberto in Day I is short, efficient; it covers only the short space of meadow. By contrast, Elissa's story of the Conte d'Anguersa (II, 8) is long, complicated, and covers a period of approximately thirty years—in terms of Elissa's metaphor, a lifetime of games and contests on a large playing field.

Rather than concentrate on the individual flowers in a meadow (*i fiori ne' verdi prati),* as the stories in Day I did, the objective of the stories of Day II is to range through the broadest field (*ampissimo campo*). While the stories of Day I, such as Maestro Alberto's, firmly establish a predilection on the part of the *brigata* for the short and neat *novella* and its quick-witted protagonists, the long-winded and convoluted plots of Day II show they also like romance. The protagonists of Day I manage their fates handily; in comparison, the heroes of Day II are forced to endure an often excessive number of trials and mishaps before finally arriving at "a state of unexpected happiness" (115). Moreover, in contrast to the stories of Day I, where protagonists wiggle their way out of difficult situations with neat turns of phrase or skillfully crafted anecdotes, the role of language in the stories of Day II is significantly reduced. Most important for the heroes of Day II is their staying power—an ability to withstand an extended period of difficult trials, usually undeserved. Time, then, plays a much larger role in Day II than in Day I. And although the "state of […] happiness" in Day II stories is attained often because the hero has acquired a certain amount of *ingegno* along the way, the signature trait of

characters in Day I—these endings require pages and pages of narrative and, sometimes, readerly patience before they are reached.

While Boccaccio accepts romance and shapes his narratives in Day II according to its literary conventions, he is generally mixed in his judgment of it. Often he is critical and will even turn romance conventions upside down in order to demonstrate their absurdity. Moreover, he often reproduces it literally in a way to reveal its limitations as well. As Millicent Marcus asserts, Boccaccio exploits those conventions in Day II which especially emphasize the power of fortune, but he reveals his resistance to romance by showing that characters who passively yield to fortune, such as Beritola, are inferior to those, such as Andreuccio and Alatiel, who are able to counteract unfavorable circumstances by means of their wit and thereby achieve happy endings.[82] However, in II, 8, the Conte d'Anguersa must rely not only upon the *ingegno* that he utilizes over the course of his thirty-year-long narrative, but upon his powers of endurance and patience as well, in order to arrive at his happy ending. There is no monolithic judgment on Boccaccio's part, then, in terms of romance; he sees something right about it, as well as critiquing it. He cannot resist exposing it for its insufficiency at the same time he reveres it.

Day II in contrast to Day I (and most of the rest of the *Decameron*) presents characters who are ruled by excessive appetites, or whose perilous fates are determined by others who cater primarily to their own excessive appetites. In II, 1, for example, Martellino, cannot resist his desires to both see the body of the saint and perform for the

[82] *An Allegory of Form* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1979), 43.

crowd of Trevisans. In II, 4, Landolfo di Rufolo, motivated by greed, seeks to augment his already substantial wealth. And in II, 5, Andreuccio cannot help himself—he must show off the bag of money he has brought with him to Naples in order to purchase horses. In other stories, protagonists of Day II find themselves so victimized by others' appetites and by circumstance that they are often forced to adopt changes in identity in order to adapt to the whims of *Fortuna*. In II, 3, the Princess of England, in order to avoid harassment during her pilgrimage to Rome, poses as an abbot. In II, 6, Madama Beritola is a noblewoman who becomes a servant out of necessity. In II, 7, Alatiel tells her father she is still a virgin after having passed through the beds of nine different men. In II, 8, the Conte d'Anguersa and his daughter and son create new identities for themselves to escape the wrath of the French royalty. Finally, in II, 9, Zinevra, Bernabò's wife, must pose as Sicurano, a man, and become a sultan's personal valet. She adopted this disguise after escaping death at the hands of a murderer hired by her husband who had heard false testimony as to her behavior while he was away on business.

Unlike Ser Ciappelletto (I, 1), who plays a false role and takes pleasure from doing so, the protagonists of Day II are often *forced* to play roles and do not particularly delight in doing so (Martellino is the exception here). In romance, role-playing is often crucial to the progress of the story and either serves as or leads to self-discovery. In several of the romance versions of his story, Lancelot disguises himself in black unmarked armor and competes in tournaments in secret to honor Guinevere. Unable to outwardly court her because of his knightly allegiance to his lord, Arthur, the love-struck

Lancelot sublimates his love for Guinevere by winning athletic trophies in her honor disguised in unidentifiable armor. Furthermore, in the *Lancelot en prose*, the "Guinevere" of the initial tryst in which Lancelot participates (the one who seals the fate of Dante's Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* V) is a false Guinevere (meaning that at this point in the cycle, Lancelot and Guinevere have not yet truly betrayed Arthur). Thus, even though this character is not the true Guinevere, the act of disguising serves to catalyze the plot of the romance cycle and heighten the reader's anticipation in that Lancelot believes he is, in fact, betraying Arthur by giving in to his desire to have an affair with his king's wife. In yet another work of the Arthurian cycle, *The Death of King Arthur*, Morgan Le Fay, Arthur's sister, disguises herself in order to sleep with her brother, and from that union she gives birth to Mordred, the character who will eventually kill Arthur in order to steal his crown. These represent a sampling of the role-playing that occurs in romance. Frye in *The Secular Scripture* asserts that external circumstances in the middle part of a romance force the hero to undergo changes in identity. In the end, the inevitable confirmation of his true identity signifies the romance hero's ability to surmount these circumstances.[83] Thus, in romance, when characters are forced to be someone or something different for a considerable amount of time, they often end up discovering their true identities. They change in order to become what they are. Lancelot's disguise, for example, like the false Guinevere of the tryst,foreshadow s the adulterous affair in which Lancelot and the real Guinevere will finally engage. Furthermore, Morgan's choice to trick her brother into conceivinga child with her seals

[83] *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 54.

her fate as a character associated with evil in the Arthurian cycle. Despite their disguises, characters are thus ontologically stable in romance.

The Conte d'Anguersa in II, 8 is a good example of just such a character. In this story, unreciprocated lovesickness on the part of the princess of France for the protagonist leads to his ruin. In the course of this twenty-page narrative, the Conte must endure some thirty years of disguising himself before he is exonerated after having been falsely accused of rape by the princess. Later on in the same story, however, the same motive that causes the protagonist's downfall ultimately serves as catalyst for his redemption: lovesickness on the part of a young nobleman for the ruined Conte's daughter (Violante who is posing as Giannetta) serves as the means by which the Conte's family regains its noble status. This repetition of a motive bespeaks the ontological stability of this particular romance.

Decameron II, 8 does not merely reproduce romance in this one way, that is, through the Conte's act of disguising himself until he is sure that revealing his true identity will not threaten his life. Several features make it a perfect recreation of the popular Gallic romances of Boccaccio's day, which in turn proves that by the time Boccaccio wrote the *Decameron*, a work that championed the genre of the *novella*, he had finally succeeded in mastering another genre that he had worked with early on in his career. The skill with which Boccaccio in *Decameron* II, 8 manages the interweaving of episodes, the manipulation of the multiple identities of the principal characters, and what Frye calls the "farfetched coincidences" fundamental to romance–all bespeak an ability

to compose romance found in such works as the *Filostrato* and the *Filocolo*.[84] All of these features make the Conte d'Anguersa's tale the romance Boccaccio was composing early on in his career before he finally flourished as a writer.

The stories of Day II, then, do more than fulfill a generic opposition between *novella* and romance in terms of short-windedness and long-windedness, quick-witted characters and characters who are buffetted about by *Fortuna*. For Boccaccio, Day II of the *Decameron* is an attempt to master a genre he sought to cultivate at the start of his career as a writer, a genre he still reveres to a certain extent. Despite his apparently inimical attitude toward romance generally in the *Decameron*, Day II shows Boccaccio is still deeply engaged with it. The story of the Conte d'Anguersa in particular merits close examination because it serves as a good example of a romance that would have appealed to courtly readers of Boccaccio's time, and shows us how the author himself conceives of courtly romance in this day of storytelling.

Ultimately, Day II reveals an awareness on Boccaccio's part that short, neat *novelle* do not suffice. Total reliance upon the *ingegno* possessed by the characters of Day I can potentially lead to disaster in the cosmos of the *Decameron*. For, while *ingegno* might help a character wiggle his way out of some situations, it cannot substitute for the virtues necessary to live a successful life. The stories of Day II will show that people also need patience, forbearance, physical stamina, humility, an ability to see their lives not as a series of clever and quick moments (the individual flowers in a meadow; *i fiori ne' verdi prati*), but as one intricate whole (the entire playing field —*l'ampissimo*

[84] *The Secular Scripture*, 47.

campo—and all the many skills necessary to win tournaments); in literary terms, they must be able to live their lives successfully as romance.

At this point, rather than proceed with an exhaustive analysis of II, 8, a look at I, 10, the story of Maestro Alberto da Bologna, is warranted because of the contrast is sets up with the stories of Day II and especially with II, 8. As previously mentioned, just before she tells the last story of Day I, Pampinea with her flower metaphor laments the loss among contemporary women of the art of conversing and using *leggiadri motti* (116). She claims that her female contemporaries would rather adorn their bodies with finery and cosmetics, elements of material culture that are often emphasized in romance, in order to distinguish themselves, than cultivate their wit and capacity for quick turnabout in conversation. Furthermore, she asserts that women justify this loss of words, this dull-wittedness, by calling it honesty and purity of mind.

In the course of her lament, Pampinea compares *leggiadri motti* to stars on cloudless nights and spring flowers in verdant fields (*i fiori ne' verdi prati nella primavera*). She goes on to say that, being brief, *motti* are better suited to women than to men:

> Valorose giovani, come ne' lucidi sereni sono le stelle ornamento del cielo e nella primavera i fiori ne' verdi prati, così de' laudevoli costumi e de' ragionamenti piacevoli sono i leggiadri motti. Li quali, per ciò che brievi sono, molto meglio alle donne stanno che agli uomini, in quanto più alle donne che agli uomini il molto parlare e lungo, quando senza esso si possa fare, si disdice, come che oggi poche o niuna donna rimasa ci sia la quale o no 'ntenda alcuno leggiadro o a quello,

> se pur lo 'ntendesse, sappia rispondere: general vergogna è di noi e di tutte quelle che vivono. (116)
>
> (Just as the sky, worthy young ladies, is bejewelled with stars on cloudless nights, and the verdant fields are embellished with flowers in the spring, so good manners and pleasant converse are enriched by shafts of wit. These, being brief, are much better suited to women than to men, as it is more unseemly for a woman to speak at inordinate length, when it can be avoided, than it is for a man. Yet, nowadays, to the universal shame of ourselves and all living women, few or none of the women who are left can recognize a shaft of wit when they hear one, or reply to it even if they recognize it; 107.)

Significantly, the story that Pampinea then tells involves an older and distinguished man, Maestro Alberto, who unfortunately falls in love with Madonna Malgherida dei Ghisolieri, a young and insensitive widow. In order to cure himself of his own lovesickness, Maestro Alberto, a physician, makes use of just such a *leggiadro motto*. By putting the *motto* in the mouth of Maestro Alberto, Pampinea shows that if the use of verbal wit is dying out among women, the practice of using a *bel motto* is being kept alive by an older generation of men.

After days of walking or riding by Madonna Malgherida's house, Maestro Alberto is finally invited in by the young woman and her friends who have agreed at last to indulge the old man by allowing him a social visit. After Maestro Alberto sits down with them and eats and drinks, they eventually ask how one as old as he could be courting a woman who has so many younger, abler, and more attractive admirers. Despite the obvious insult, Maestro Alberto maintains his composure. His answer is concise, unique, and clever:

> Madonna, che io ami, questo non dee esser maraviglia a alcun savio e spezialmente voi, per ciò, che voi il valete. E come che per gli antichi amorosi essercizii si richeggiono, non è per ciò lor tolto la buona volontà né lo intendere quello che sia da essere amato, ma tanto piú dalla natura conosciuto, quanto essi hanno piú di conoscimento che i giovani. La speranza, la qual mi muove che io vecchio ami voi amata da molti giovani, è questa: io sono stato piú volte già là dove ho vedute merendarsi le donne e mangiare lupini e porri; e come che nel porro niuna cosa sia buona, pur men reo e piú piacevole alla bocca è il capo di quello, il quale voi generalmente, da torto appetito tirate, il capo vi tenete in mano e manicate le frondi, le quali non solamente non sono da cosa alcuna ma son di malvagio sapore. E che so io, madonna, se nello elegger degli amanti voi vi faceste il simigliante? E se voi il faceste, io sarei colui che elletto sarei da voi, e gli altri cacciati via. (120)
>
> (My lady, the fact that I am enamoured should not excite the wonder of anyone who is wise, and especially not your own, because you are worthy of my love. For albeit old men are naturally deficient in the powers required for lovemaking, they do not necessarily lack a ready will, or a just appreciation of what should be loved. On the contrary, in this respect, their longer experience gives them an advantage over the young. The hope which sustains an old man like myself in loving one who is loved, as you are, by many young men, is founded on what I have often observed in places where I have seen ladies eating lupins and leeks whilst taking a meal out of doors. For although no part of the leek is good, yet the part which is less objectionable and more pleasing to the palate is the root, which you ladies are generally drawn by some aberration of the appetite to hold in the hand while you eat the leaves, which are not only worthless, but have an unpleasant taste. How am I to know, my lady, whether you are not equally eccentric in choosing your lovers? For if this were so, I should be the one you would choose, and the others would be cast aside; 109-110.)

What could potentially prove an embarrassing moment for Maestro Alberto turns into his triumph because he is able to articulate a witty retort and shape the verbal situation to his

advantage. Upon hearing his reply, the women are so astounded by Maestro Alberto's clever speech, and ashamed of having questioned his presumption in falling in love with a younger woman, that they are dumbstruck. The young woman who is the object of his admiration has no initial response, but then admits that he is worthy of her affection, and thus agrees to accept his courtship. Rather than engage in a relationship with a woman who has questioned his worthiness because of his age and appearance, however, Maestro Alberto rejects her and leaves.

The irony of this situation is a perennial one. When Maestro Alberto is kind and gentle toward the young woman, she rejects his every effort to court her, and even laughs at his sincerity. When, however, he recounts a misogynistic and sexually-charged anecdote about women, she is completely won over by him. The misogyny underlying this story cannot be ignored; what Maestro Alberto is implying with his witty comment on women and their love for the bitter parts of leeks is that women are perverse and only love that which is unworthy. (The scholar in *Uno scolaro e la vedova* [VIII, 7] says as much.)

Maestro Alberto's *motto* succeeds where his effort to court the young woman fails because he suggests to her that older men are better lovers than younger men precisely because they have more experience, and therefore know how to please women. In terms of the leek metaphor, the white and tastier part of the leek represents the phallus of an older man, his own, and the green and bitter part represents the phallus of a younger man, her myriad suitors. Further, not only does Maestro Alberto's phallus taste better than the younger men's, but its taste parallels his linguistic dexterity. His sexual performance is

as delectable as his power of speech, and insofar as the girl makes this substitution (a clever tongue equals a good phallus), she falls for him. Maestro Alberto "cures" himself of lovesickness by using a leggiadro motto. This is consistent with Glending Olson's theory that in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio generally associates the *novella* with health-giving storytelling (see Chapter 2). The irony here is that physician cures/heals himself.

There are several levels of narrative to consider at this moment. Boccaccio has chosen a strong female presence in the *brigata*, Pampinea, to tell a story of a well-spoken and distinguished older gentleman who turns an adverse situation to his favor by using a witty and erotic turn of phrase. He defends himself by attacking women and their young lovers. The fact that Pampinea has a man utter this *leggiadro motto* (which she formerly asserted was more appropriate for women because of its brevity) is significant because in this way the stage is set for the contrast between *novelle* such as this one and those of Day II both structurally and thematically. Pampinea's discussion of brief versus lengthy responses prepares the reader for the contrast in the long romances that are to come in Day II. Moreover, the lovesickness that Maestro Alberto suffers at the beginning of his story corresponds to the kind frequently found in romance (e. g., Tristan's for Isolde, Lancelot's for Guinevere), as well as in a number of the stories of Day II (e. g., 3, 7, 8 and 10). Finally, the choice of having Maestro Alberto utter a *motto*, a practice traditionally identified with women, prepares us for another twist of an old form: the heroes of the romances of Day II are not knights in shining armor, but merchants, bankers, horse-traders, and women. Even II, 8, a story that closely follows the literary conventions of romance, has an untraditional hero, a count the narrator calls a *servidore*

(259). Given that the Conte d'Anguersa stays back at court while the king and the prince go into battle, his role seems more that of a seneschal (e. g., Kay in the Arthurian tradition) rather than that of a knight.

Guido Almansi regards the tale of Maestro Alberto da Bologna as "a clear-cut case of 'opposite conclusion' […] novelle" characteristic of Day I.[85] Likewise, Vittore Branca points out that this last *novella* of Day I serves two narrative objectives within the *Decameron*: first, it is a perfect example of the structural technique of inversion (*rovesciamento*), and second, it anticipates Day VI in its privileging of the *bel motto* [86] What critics fail to acknowledge is that Maestro Alberto manages to escape the dangerous landscape of romance because his powers of reason enable him to use rhetoric to extricate himself from a misadventure, a doomed affair. As an added benefit, he makes a fool of the woman who seeks to take advantage of his weakness with his extremely clever and erotic description of women stroking leeks and opting to eat the bitter green leafy parts rather than the tasty roots.[87] Later on in II, 8, the princess of France, who falls in love with the Conte d'Anguersa, will not experience the same enlightenment when her advances are rejected by him. Indeed, in the heat of the crucial moment, neither the princess nor the Conte will succeed in avoiding disaster by using such a *leggidro motto* . The simple fact that neither the princess of France nor the Conte d'Anguersa is unable to find a cure (i. e., a *motto*) to combat her lovesickness will cause the story to continue for twenty-five pages longer than Maestro Alberto's.

[85] Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 52.
[86] ***Decameron***, ed. Vittore Branca, 121, n. 2.
[87] Ibid., 116, n. 1

Maestro Alberto begins his story as a dupe who, initially a victim of lovesickness, is able to transform himself through his intellect into a savvy and successful *motteggiatore* before the end. By contrast, in Day II, protagonists who begin as dupes generally remain so either until *Fortuna* dictates otherwise (Martellino, Rinaldo, Beritola), or until they are finally able to counteract unfavorable circumstances by means of their wit (Andreuccio, Alatiel, Zinevra/Sicurano). Indeed, the protagonists of Day II are often subject to what other characters do, so that it takes longer for them than it does protagonists from other parts of the *Decameron* to reach the point where they can rely on the power of their wits. This change in narrative style from Day I to Day II is explicitly dictated by Filomena, the queen of Day II, at the conclusion of Day I, and implicitly provoked by Pampinea, the queen of Day I, when she prefaces her tale of Maestro Alberto with a speech that characterizes brief stories as better and more valuable than lengthy ones.

At the end of Day I, Filomena states her intention to delimit the subject matter of the stories of the following day for every member of the *brigata* except Dioneo. Not only will he be granted the privilege from now on of telling the last story of each day, but he will also be exempt from the theme of storytelling on any given day. In terms of the specific narrative theme of Day II, Filomena assents to both of Dioneo's requests for fear that the *brigata* will "grow weary of hearing people talk" (112). This is the first clue provided regarding the narrators', and perhaps the author's criticism of, and apprehension about, confronting the vast texts of romance. Furthermore, in granting Dioneo the privilege of telling the last story of each day, we are cued to regard his stories as the

"special" on every day of storytelling. For, while the stories of Day II are commonly acknowledged by critics as successful examples of romance, the *brigata's* responses to the tales of this day are some of the most lukewarm and unenthusiastic in the *Decameron*. Clearly, there is a preoccupation on the part of the narrator, and therefore the author, in regard to what romance entails, and Filomena's dispensation to Dioneo, beginning specifically at Day II, could be prompted precisely by this fear. The fact is, it could have been given on any day, but Dioneo is granted his special privilege of exemption from the theme of the day on Day II, the day of romance.

A look at the way in which Boccaccio takes romance in general and makes something new of it in the *novelle* of Day II reveals his extensive experience with many types of romance (as well as anti-romance), and will help formulate a definition of romance as Boccaccio understood it and deploys it on this day.

All of the stories of Day II conform on some level to Frye's model of romance with its threefold structure of home-journey into the land of adventures home again: Martellino goes Florence to Treviso and then returns to it; Rinaldo d'Asti is on his way home from a business trip; Alessandro leaves Florence to serve as a banker to the nobility of England, and in the end returns to Florence; Landolfo sets out from Ravello on the high seas to improve his fortune, and then comes back to Ravello; Andreuccio leaves Perugia for Naples to buy horses and presumably returns home after his adventures there; Beritola is forced from her beloved Sicily until political circumstances permit her return; Alatiel leaves her father's kingdom to marry the king of the Algarve, but ends up back at her father's kingdom before she sets sail once again to marry the same king; the Conte

d'Anguersa must sojourn in Wales until it is safe for him to re-enter England (i. e., until the princess who had accused him of rape confesses to her lie on her deathbed); and Zinevra stows away on a merchant's ship disguised as a man, and ends up serving as a valet to a sultan who then permits her finally to return to her husband. In story ten, the pattern is, in fact, confirmed precisely because it is carried out to a certain extent, but is also violated by Dioneo. Bartolomea, while she is free to return home to her husband, Messer Riccardo, at the end of her tale, chooses instead to remain with Paganino, the pirate who kidnapped her at the beginning of the story.

Because of Dioneo's special dispensations from Queen Filomena at the end of Day I regarding storytelling, he has a right to violate the norm. In his story, Dioneo recounts how Messer Ricciardo di Chinzica,[88] a prominent and wealthy lawyer of Pisa more interested in legal studies than in the concerns of conjugal love, has nevertheless taken a bride, Bartolomea, not only the most beautiful woman in Pisa, but young as well. Riccardo thinks nothing of the disparity of their ages initially. After the challenge he experiences on the wedding night of consummating the marriage, however, he proceeds to teach his wife the religious calendar in order to make her aware of the multitude of feast days when they will have to abstain from lovemaking. It is hardly surprising in the world of the *Decameron* that when Bartolomea, out on a boat for a recreational sail with her husband, is kidnapped by the virile, young pirate Paganino, she would decide to remain with her captor regardless of her marital status.

[88] Note that in the preface to his story, he is referred to as Messer Ricciardo di Chinzica, while in the text, he is Riccardo. Going forward, I refer to him by the name in the text, Messer Riccardo, 303-304.

In different ways, all of the protagonists of Day II have withdrawn from their communities, either by choice or because they are forced to do so. Furthermore, all find themselves at some point helpless in the throes of perilous adventures. Finally, once circumstances allow for it, or they are able to exercise their own *ingegno*, each of these characters is permitted a safe return home. By contrast, in II, 10, Bartolomea chooses to remain in the "adventure" or "middle" part of her romance story. Instead of returning home to the safety of Messer Riccardo and his calendar full of religious feast days, Bartolomea chooses to remain with her husband's opposite, the pirate Paganino, whose name, significantly, means "little pagan." Messer Riccardo ultimately realizes the error he made having taken a young woman as his wife when he knew he was physically inadequate. He lives out the rest of his life devastated because of his loss, regretting his decision to have wed Bartolomea:

> Messer Riccardo, veggendosi a mal partito e pure allora conoscendo la sua follia d'aver moglie giovane tolta essendo spossato, dolente e tristo s'uscí della camera e disse parole assai a Paganino le quali non montavano un frullo. E ultimamente, senza alcuna cosa aver fatta, lasciata la donna, a Pisa ritornò; e in tanta mattezza per dolor cadde, che andando per Pisa, a chiunque il salutava o d'alcuna cosa il domandava, niuna altra cosa rispondeva, se non: "Il mal furo non vuol festa"; e dopo non molto tempo si morí. (313-314)
>
> (On seeing that the situation was hopeless, and realizing for the first time how foolish he had been to take a young wife when he was so impotent, Messer Riccardo walked out of the room, feeling all sad and forlorn, and although he had a long talk with Paganino, it made no difference whatever. And so finally, having achieved precisely nothing, he left the lady there and returned to Pisa, where his grief threw him into such a state of lunacy that whenever people met him in the street

> and put any question to him, the only answer they got was:
> 'There's no rest for the bar.' Shortly afterwards he died…; 227.)

Just like Maestro Alberto of I, 10, Messer Riccardo, a distinguished and cultivated professional, fell in love with a young and nubile woman. But that which Maestro Alberto finds out early on in his *novella*, that is, that younger women are often incapable of appreciating an older spouse, Messer Riccardo learns too late.

There are two primary issues to consider at the end of Messer Riccardo's tale: first, there is a striking contrast between his grief and death on one hand, and the fact that he is meant to be seen as funny on the other (every member of the *brigata* laughs so heartily at his story that *niuna ve n'era a cui non dolessero le mascelle* [315]); and, second, the *motto* he utters at the end *Il mal furo non vuol festa* (314), fails to cure the lovesick Riccardo. While *motti* traditionally not only save, but cure, protagonists in the *Decameron* (see Chapter 2), here Riccardo's *motto* fails to achieve any effect whatsoever.

The first issue is simple enough: it is always satisfying to witness the downfall of a notable and respected pillar of the community, especially when the cause of the downfall is scandalous. While it is not clear in Messer Riccardo's story whether his fellow Pisani at the time laugh at him, we do know that the members of the *brigata* all engage in side-splitting laughter at his predicament. The irony here is that Messer Riccardo, an individual who uses language expertly in his profession on a daily basis, cannot manage to apply this skill to his personal well-being. Not only does he utter his *motto* too late in the story—it is the very last thing he says in the tale—but its relative

status is questionable as well. It is not only obscure in that it is so specialized, but it reveals just how dark and bitter Messer Riccardo became during the course of his *novella*. According to Branca, the phrase Riccardo invariably said to everyone in the end upon being greeted, *Il mal furo non vuol festa* (314) (literally, "The wicked hole refuses to take a holiday," [819]) exploits the Pisan pronunciation of *foro*, meaning the courtroom (or legal forum). The expression *furo*, while it refers figuratively to Bartolomea's vagina, reminds us simultaneously of Riccardo's devotion to his profession practiced in the *foro*. It is precisely in his *motto* that we find Riccardo's flaw, and perhaps the reason Bartolomea chooses to remain wayward: Riccardo was never able to separate his work from leisure. He devoted all his energy to his work with no regard to festa. He wants to blame Bartolomea's lust, but in the end it is his inability to maintain the marriage contract (mentioned by Cappellanus in his *Art of Courtly Love*) that drives her away.

Dioneo, in omitting the last phase of the traditional threefold pattern, makes his story ironic. Rather than returning home with her husband to Pisa, Bartolomea decides that the adventure portion of her romance, in which she serves as mistress to a criminal, a marginal figure, is preferable to her life as the wife of Messer Riccardo, a man of means who is respected in his community. Dioneo's heroine privileges her natural sexual impulse over her vow as Riccardo's wife. With Bartolomea, the day of romance ends much as it began with Martellino—with characters incapable of denying their natural appetites, the former for sex, the latter for spectacle.

Although the stories of Day II seem to comply structurally with romance, their landscapes are not the traditional one of romance, which is conventionally an enchanted forest, a wild space where anything can happen. Instead, they take place mostly in contemporary urban settings such as cities and towns (e. g., Treviso, Paris, Naples), or on popular trade/pilgrimage routes (e. g., on the roads between Bologna and Asti and London and Rome). Nevertheless, to signal the relationship of these stories to romance, Boccaccio sometimes alludes to elements of romance tradition within them. For example, since saints' legends typically employ the conventions of romance, Boccaccio evokes those legends in different ways. In II, 1, for example, Martellino pretends to be a paralytic in order to get closer to the body of St. Arrigo, a local saint of Treviso whose corpse lies in state in the catherdral; In II, 2, Rinaldo d'Asti claims to pray to San Giuliano, a patron saint of safe lodging, while on the road; and in II, 7, Alatiel reassures her father by telling him that while she was lost, she lived in a nunnery where Saint Cresci-in-Calcava was worshipped. By including such intertextual references within his stories, Boccaccio contrasts the traditional romance space of the legend with the realistic space of his tale, and in doing so, sets up an opposition between the genre of romance and his genre of preference in the *Decameron*, the *novella*. Ultimately, though, St. Arrigo and St. Cresci-in- Valcava do not save Martellino and Alatiel, respectively, any more than St. Giuliano rescues Rinaldo d'Asti. Thus, Boccaccio displaces not only the genre of romance generally here, but specifically its Christian form, the saint's legend. In other words, in each of these stories, the sacred is replaced by the material and the secular. Martellino is pardoned, freed from jail, and rewarded by an indulgent nobleman. A

woman saves Rinaldo d'Asti from exposure and grants him a meal, clothes, and a night in her bed. And Alatiel is rescued primarily through the good fortune of meeting one of her father's courtiers, Antigono, in Cyprus, and then through her own wits as she wisely decides to follow this courtier's advice—that is, to tell her father a good, somewhat abridged, and mendacious version of her story about her lost years rather than the long, detailed, weepy and accurate account she told Antigono. None of these protagonists does anything to merit the misfortunes they suffer or the rewards they get. All are helpless victims whose misfortunes may be partly due to personal faults, but are mostly due to bad luck, and whose salvation is effectively out of their hands. What ties these stories' endings together is that the hero receives some sort of material reward. They are not about a saint's divine intervention, let alone about a knight's confirming his elite identity, but about people getting the goods of the world.

Fortune in romance is unpredictable and arbitrary in the way it dispenses the good and the bad, but the hero and his motives are easily identifiable, and he inevitably returns *as a hero* to the applause of his community after his perilous adventure no matter how severe and bizarre his misadventures. In the stories of Day II, this characteristic is problematized because of the nature of Boccaccian romance heroes—an itinerant clown (1), three merchants (2, 4, and 5), a banker (3), and four women (6, 7, 9, and 10). It appears, then, that in Boccaccio's understanding, romance needs to be rewritten because it presents problems in that the genre focuses on unrealistic heroes who are virtuous beyond belief, maintain unfeasible codes of honor, and perform impossible feats of bravery. The author highlights what is missing by casting untraditional characters in the

role of protagonists in stories that structurally appear to be romances. Some of these protagonists succeed in rising to the occasion; others are lacking in the *virtú* required to survive in this genre. As he does elsewhere in Day II, Boccaccio is re-creating romance on his own terms.

Rather than following the strict parameters of the form, as he did in the *Filocolo* and the *Filostrato*, Boccaccio allows his romance heroes in the *Decameron* a certain amount of license in order to appeal to his contemporary audience. First, as mentioned above, his heroes are not necessarily noble as they are in romance, but practice professions common in his own society. Many of the protagonists of Day II, in fact, work to gain a living. And when the characters do come from a noble family, they are either unaware of it, like Alessandro, or spend most of their *novella* hiding their status, like Beritola and Alatiel.

Next, Boccaccio allows his romance hero to roam in realistic, modern spaces rather than in the enchanted forests of the conventional form. Martellino's adventure, for example, occurs in a foreign city, Treviso. It is worth noting that Martellino is a citizen of a Republic, Florence, and his adventure unfolds in a town with a noble ruler, a prince. This fact is ironic in that the appropriate protagonist of a romance is the prince of noble blood, not the republican citizen. Rinaldo d'Asti's adventure unfolds on the road somewhere in between Bologna and his home. Alessandro is yet another Florentine citizen living abroad in a monarchy, England. It can be argued, though, that a significant portion of his story unfolds on the road, on his trip home from England to Florence. And the crucial middle part of Andreuccio's tale occurs in the labyrinth of a section of

downtown Naples known as *malpertugio* (literally, bad hole, or opening)—for Boccaccio, a modern-day setting, and again, a city governed by a foreign monarchy during Boccaccio's time, the Angevin King Robert the Wise.[89]

The importance of the various shapes of these plots is this: by including traditional elements of romance in these stories—foreign-ness of places as a substitute for the exotic locale of traditional romance, latent nobility, the perilous voyage—Boccaccio is able to keep the reader convinced of the fact that Day II is dedicated to romance in the *Decameron*. These romances are, however, distinctly new and different, and this new-ness and difference represent Boccaccio's distinct appropriation of an older form.

The way in which happy endings are reached on this day also shows how Boccaccio rewrites romance. Romance traditionally ends with some type of return to normalcy after an extended, abnormal set of adventures. That ending is almost always happy, and this happiness is often expressed through a social ritual, such as a marriage or a holiday feast. For the most part, Boccaccio's romance heroes likewise return to a former and normal existence after their adventures. However, not all their stories end in ritual. To be sure, Martellino is saved from jail, punishment, and receives new clothes; Rinaldo d'Asti and Landolfo Rufolo are rescued by women, and receive carnal and material gratification from each of them respectively; Andreuccio, after being robbed of all his money, learns how to steal from Neapolitan thieves and takes a ruby ring from the tomb of an archbishop, thus replenishing his fortune; and Alatiel re-gains her status as a

[89] I am indebted here to Greg Lucente in his reading, "The Fortunate Fall of Andreuccio da Perugia." Lucente associates Boccaccio's mention of *Malpertugio* in Andreuccio's story with another *pertugio*, Dante's allusion in the very last lines of *Inferno* XXXIV to a *pertugio tondo* through which the pilgrim is able to view the sky bearing beautiful things to come, 340.

virgin, thus retaining her former status as valuable chattle for her father to ship off once again to the King of the Algarve. Nevertheless, we never witness the details of the reintegration of the hero back into the community after the perilous adventure. We are never privy to the details of the welcome home celebration. We are simply told that Alessandro and Alatiel, for instance, will be imminently celebrating royal nuptials.

The most important element in the end of a romance is the undeniable joy, happiness, and material wealth (fine food, clothes, entertainment, etc.) given to the worthy romance hero after the adventure in the middle part of his story. However, although the material thus confirms the spiritual, it is not the end pursued. Boccaccio's characters, on the other hand, generally pursue—and gain—the material as an end in itself, after which we are told that a character returns home safe and sound.

Decameron II, 8 seems quite close to traditional romance, by contrast, for there is no doubt as to the legitimate hero, and his goals are not material but spiritual (he seeks to serve his king and prince faithfully). In fact, this is as typical a version of romance as Boccaccio gives us. It is clear throughout the thirty pages of narrative that we should sympathize with the Conte d'Anguersa. To paraphrase Frye in both *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Secular Scripture*, there is no anxiety on the reader's part as to the status of good and evil. The story is told from the Conte's point of view, and he is clearly the focus of our attention. This is the primary reason that II, 8 makes for such a good romance as Boccaccio might have understood it and perhaps it is a principal reason for the lukewarm reception it receives by the *brigata.*

Unlike other stories in the *Decameron*, this one has no element of surprise, there is nothing erotic to pique the listener's interest, and there is little, if any, of the *rovesciamento* found so often in other tales. Consider how II, 8 duplicates the elements of romance such as the Arthurian legend that was popular in Boccaccio's day. First, just as Lancelot was assigned the task of protecting Guinevere by Arthur while he was away from his kingdom, there is an attractive Conte who is entrusted with the kingdom while the king is away. Second, just as Guinevere becomes infatuated with the young Lancelot, the bored and lovesick princess left alone craves the attention of the Conte. Third, there is a betrayal of the lower nobility by the upper nobility, in that Guinevere encourages Lancelot's attention with no regard to the fact that she jeopardizes his status within Arthur's court in doing so, the lovesick princess seeks to seduce the Conte with no regard for his position within the court. Fourth, just as Lancelot jousts in tournaments in disguise in order to secretly honor Guinevere, the principal characters adopt new identities to protect themselves. Fifth, just as Guinevere (in certain versions) finally retires to a convent and lives out the rest of her life regretting her affair with Lancelot, the princess finally repents when she is about to die. Finally, at the end of some cycles of the Arthurian romances, Arthur forgives Lancelot, and in others, Lancelot retires to a monastery. This last detail varies according to the version. The Conte is restored to his original condition, with the reward of a noble title for his trouble.

Since there is never any question regarding the Conte's innocence and the princess's guilt, the end of the story is predictable. He remains, throughout the story, the hero, the good guy, while she is, from beginning to end, the source of evil. She only

confesses at the end of her life in order to leave this world with a clear conscience. As in traditional romance, these characters are ontologically stable.

The ensuing discussion on the part of the *brigata* is minimal. While the members of the *brigata* laugh heartily at II, 1, 5 and 10, admire the good fortune of Rinaldo d'Asti (II, 2), call Alessandro's a *glorioso fine* (II, 3), sigh at the trials of Alatiel (II, 7), and commend Zinevra (II, 9), only the omniscient narrator takes the initiative to call Elissa's tale *compassionevole*/touching (283, 207). Given the fact that this story is the longest in the *Decameron*, we must ask what Boccaccio is trying to prove here.

Perhaps Boccaccio dislocates romance in his literary cosmos, which is dedicated to the *novella*, in order to critique the traditional values of romance. The responses on the part of the *brigata* to each of the stories of Day II only reconfirm Dioneo's proclamation in the Introduction to Day I regarding the primary directive of the *brigata*: *a sollazzare e a ridere e a cantare* (42). The more romance is undermined the more extensive the reaction on the part of the *brigata*. The more straightforwardly romance is told, the more silent the group remains.

Take, for example, the hero of the second story of Day II, Rinaldo d'Asti, whose good fortune is admired by the *brigata* at the end of his tale. He is, we are told, a finely dressed merchant on his way home from Bologna where he has just conducted business. During hie journey, he accidentally befriends thieves who convince him they mean well by asking him what prayers he prays while traveling, and then proceed to strip him of all of his belongings, including his horse and his clothing. Just as in Martellino's story, the narrator alludes to a saint's legend in telling the story. Rinaldo replies that he prays an

Our Father and a Hail Mary in honor of San Giuliano, well known in the Middle Ages as the "Saint of Hospitality," when he travels in order to ensure "good lodging for the night to come" (121). Implicit in this "good lodging," according to legend, is an attractive sleeping partner. Branca traces the foundation of this story to the legend of San Giuliano, a romance of enormous popularity in the Middle Ages.[90] Found in a variety of texts from *fabliaux* to troubadour chronicles to the Golden Legend to Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*, "Julian the Hospitaller" was allegedly a nobleman who through a mistake of identity killed hiw own father and mother. In order to repent for his unwitting crime, he went to live with his wife beside a ford across a river where they provided shelter for both travelers and the poor.

Proving he is familiar with the legend, Rinaldo d'Asti aserts that when traveling, he recites *un paternostro e un avemaria per l'anima del padre e della madre di san Giuliano* (144), and he ends with a prayer to God and the saint for a "good night's lodging."

By chance, in the meantime, a widow who lives close to the scene of the crime is waiting for her lover, a marquis, who is standing her up. The marquis sends word that he must cancel their scheduled tryst that evening just as the widow hears the wails and moans of the half-naked Rinaldo outside her house. She invites him in to eat, bathe, and clothe himself with her deceased husband's clothing. The two then spend the night together at her suggestion, and the following day, Rinaldo is able to return home and collect all of his lost belonging because the thieves have been arrested.

[90] The following combines information from notes in Branca and McWilliam, 141-2; 811.

While in the Conte d'Anguersa's tale the protagonist adheres to the chivalric code and refuses to compromise his ethics, even when a princess tries to tempt him, he becomes victim of her unrequited lust for some thirty years. Rinaldo, on the other hand, succumbs to the widow's temptation (perhaps out of fear and desperation at having just been robbed and left out in the middle of nowhere, or perhaps simply because he was attracted to her), and not only is her rescued by her and rewarded with all the comforts of home for the night, but is able to recover all of his stolen things on the following day. The Conte seemingly does the honorable thing, and is punished. Rinaldo acts on impulse and receives immediate gratification and then some. If the *brigata* admires Rinaldo's good fortune, then *Fortuna* in the*Decameron* is an oedipal mother—she takes care of you and fulfills your sexual needs.

Despite its inappropriateness in the *Decameron,* Boccaccio is successful in re-creating romance in Day II because he does so on his own terms. In making something new of romance, he broadens the definition of what one needs to survive the vicissitudes of this genre. Once he has established the pattern of romance in these stories, there are two results. First, the author uses romance and the virtues required by romance in its heroes as a way of admitting that wittiness alone is not sufficient for success in the world. Multiple virtues make for a more successful life in the long run. Second, as Boccaccio recreates romance, he is also critiquing the values it traditionally privileges. The story written closest to conventional romance, II, 8, serves as a subtle confirmation of this critique in the lack of reaction to it on the part of the *brigata*, as well as the admission on

the part of the narrator that Elissa, the storyteller, had *il suo dover fornito*/"her duty done" (283, 207). In characterizing Elissa's *novella* (II, 8) in this way, as if it were a homework assignment satisfactorily completed, the narrator again alludes to apprehension on his part about the status of romance. In general, the heroes of Day II adapt to all of the misadventures wrought by fortune, but the values they adhere to are not necessarily chivalrous icons of the Middle Ages, but rather the individualistic ones Boccaccio—and the Renaissance—prefer.

CHAPTER 4

"Calandrino's Interlaced Romance in the *Decameron*"

> The *Decameron* is inhabited by characters who become available for one single adventure, with the sole exception of Calandrino and his clowning friends, whose periodic reappearances are an unusual feature in the general strategy of the work.[91]

During the eighth and ninth days of the *Decameron*, four members of the *brigata*, Elissa (in VIII, 3), Filomena (in VIII, 6), Filostrato (in IX, 3), and Fiammetta (in IX, 5), engage a narrative practice up until this point absent: they all tell tales featuring the same protagonist, Calandrino. Although the stories are not told consecutively, one after the other, critics have, for various reasons, dubbed these four tales the Calandrino cycle, suggesting "that they be read as a coherent unit."[92] While Mario Baratto, for example, reads the tales as four acts of a single comedy, Millicent Marcus sees them more specifically as "a serialized portrait of gullibility in all its possible permutations."[93] Giuseppe Mazzotta's analysis of *Decameron* VIII, 3, however, points us in yet another direction in terms of how to read the four tales:

> Calandrino's foolishness is his chief liability but also his strongest asset. As he is visible, he opens our eyes to a world which is too small, to a vision which is too narrow; and his

[91] Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 75.
[92] Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form* (Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1979), 79. See also Mario Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel 'Decameron'* (Vicenza: Pozza, 1974), 314; Salvatore Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del medioevo* (Naples, 1965), 701; Luigi Russo, *Il Decameron* (Bari: Laterza, 1939), 443; and R. Zapperi, *La prostituzione nel Medioevo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1995), 105 n17.
[93] *An Allegory of Form*, 79.

story is *a veritable romance of which he is the mad hero*.[94]

In calling the tales a "cycle," we are reminded of another way in which to look at Calandrino and his set of adventures beyond the obvious comedy of errors they represent, that is, in terms of his association with characters from romance such as Arthur, Lancelot, and Merlin. These characters reappear in so many episodes of particular romances that there have resulted over time various Arthurian cycles, several Lancelot cycles, and a Merlin cycle. Just as in these romance cycles, in the Calandrino cycle, the storytellers in the *Decameron* use a technique like *entrelacement*, a technique first proposed by Eugène Vinaver in *The Rise of Romance* in order to account for and decipher the interlaced composition of those works, and they so do in the *Decameron* in order to tell one whole romance, the romance of Calandrino.

Over the course of the four tales, Calandrino emerges not only as a hero out of romance, but as one who reads the world as if it were romance. Given his status as the ultimate dupe of the *Decameron*, the author's deployment of the romance convention of the protagonist's appearance in serialized episodes to recount Calandrino's story can be seen as both Boccaccio's ultimate critique of romance, as well as evidence that he is still grappling with a need to prove himself as a legitimate romance writer even at this late stage in the ten days of his work. For, while best known as the hapless Calandrino who never learns a lesson regardless of how brutal the outcome of his tale, he is nevertheless

[94] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 198; my emphasis.

the only protagonist in the *Decameron* who enjoys the privilege of having multiple tales recounted about him.

The members of the *brigata* roar with laughter at his fate, but the uproarious laughter combined with his multiple appearances in Days VIII and IX call for an examination of the Calandrino cycle in order to understand why the storytellers return to this figure repeatedly, to reveal what so much laughter may be concealing on their part. If Calandrino has the kind of imagination that generates romance, and four out of ten members of the *brigata* cannot help but tell stories about him, there may well be a relationship between the protagonist's imagination and the kind of imaginations the members of the *brigata* possess.

While the storytellers, being urbane and sophisticated Florentines, appear to wish to draw distinctions between their imaginations and that of Calandrino, both their laughter at the tales and their unbridled need to continue to tell tales about him signal rather an intimate understanding of Calandrino's misadventures on their part. Marcus elucidates the situation by remarking that while in the frame story the Calandrino storytellers go out of their way to apologize for repeating stories about him, yet

> (w)hat we sense, instead, is the pride and delight of the *brigata* in being able to multiply stories of Calandrino, the mere mention of whose name sets off a series of associations in the minds of the storytellers, and a chain reaction of related tales. The readiness with which these stories are produced suggests that they come from a preexisting fund of Calandrino lore—one in which the entire *brigata* shares as part of its cultural heritage. The telling of these tales thus binds the *brigata* together by demonstrating its possession of a common folk culture, replete with heroes, victims,

and in-jokes.[95]

In his capacity to "bind the *brigata* together," Calandrino symbolizes the beginning of a romance of Republican Florence precisely in the way that Arthur, Lancelot, and Merlin do for the communities of the early British empire.

Just like his more famous predecessors, Calandrino has faith in the power of the unproven and the intangible to make his life better. Just as Arthur believes in the power of magic swords with which to battle neighboring kings' armies, Calandrino believes in the power of magic rocks that enable him to disappear and steal money from Florentine moneychangers (VIII, 3). Just as Lancelot falls tragically in love with Guinevere, the king's wife, with no hope of achieving a "happily-ever-after" ending with her, Calandrino falls hopelessly in love with Niccolosa, a prostitute kept by another man (IX, 5). And just as Merlin believes in the power of his magic to bring about the impossible in Arthur's realm, Calandrino believes that he could be pregnant because he allowed his wife to be on top during intercourse (IX, 3), an act denounced as a sin in the *Confessionale* (a how-to manual for the sacrament of confession popular in Boccaccio's time) and considered by the ecclesiastical authorities as serious as sodomy.[96] What makes Calandrino a fit protagonist for romance, however, fails to work in his favor in the Boccaccian *novella*. His faith in the power of magic stones, in adulterous love, and in the possibility of the impossible, all perfectly acceptable in romance, lead Calandrino to ruin in the *Decameron*.

[95] *An Allegory of Form*, 80.
[96] Concetto Del Popolo, "Un'espressione di Calandrino," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 27 (1999): 107-112.

Although the storytellers of the *brigata* want to distance themselves from the likes of Calandrino, it is clear from both their reaction to his tales and their need to tell stories about him that he serves as the representative of a stock Florentine character of their day. That the storytellers choose to engage romance conventions to tell his story, to use serialized tales interwoven throughout two days, speaks to two crucial issues: 1) after many days of telling *novelle*, short tales that privilege witty and quick-thinking protagonists, the members of the *brigata* show that they also delight in the misadventures of the character who finds himself on the flipside of fortune's favor; and 2) their need to play out his story in not one, but four tales, while for the rest of the *Decameron* all other protagonists have only appeared in one tale, serves as evidence that the members of the *brigata* may well identify with Calandrino intimately, and potentially share at least some of his perplexity in contemplating the world in which they live.

In the course of his romance, Calandrino falls prey to many cruel tricks orchestrated by his close companions for many reasons. First, he is a victim of persuasive speech in that he believes, for instance, Maso del Saggio's tale of Bengodi (VIII, 3). Second, he believes that words and images represent truth; for example, if he had intercourse with his wife in a position condemned in writing by the Church, he must be guilty and therefore have to pay a debt to society (pregnancy) in order to repent for his sin (IX, 3). Finally, he eternally maintains a firm faith in himself as a competent reader of events in his life, or, in terms of Boccaccio's *Decameron,* as someone who is *avveduto*. As Marcus asserts,

> Calandrino is seduced by the appearance of truth …never probing beneath the surface to explore disparate meanings which appearances often belie.[97]

When he falls in love with Niccolosa, for example, he never stops to consider that she may not reciprocate his feelings, so that he may not succeed in wooing her. He tells Bruno:

> Tu non mi credevi oggi, quando io il ti diceva: per certo, sozio, io *m'aveggio* che io so meglio che altro uomo far ciò che io voglio. *Chi avrebbe saputo*, altri che io, far cosí tosto innamorare una cosí fatta donna come è costei? (1066) (my emphasis)
>
> (You wouldn't believe me today, when I told you. But you must admit, comrade, that when it comes to obtaining what I want, I know better than anybody else how to go about it. What other man could have persuaded a lady of her quality to fall in love with him so quickly?; 672.)

Calandrino's verbs of choice in this passage, *avedersi* (to see oneself; to perceive) and *sapere* (to know), serve to reveal his blind faith in his own powers of perception, his faith in himself as *avveduto*. There are two further issues to consider here. First, this is the fourth and last Calandrino story of the cycle, and he still sees no problem in his reading of the events taking place in his world. And second, he is such an ideal victim of persuasive speech that he even believes his own words. His outlook, his expectations, his sense of the world and himself--in short, his self--never changes throughout the four

[97] *An Allegory of Form*, 87.

tales. His being an ontologically stable character also makes him the perfect hero of romance (see Chapter 3).

Taken as a coherent unit, Calandrino's stories then are apparently comedic and, at the same time, cautionary. The moral of the first story is: if a seemingly wise person tells you of magic stones, consult the wisdom not only of friends, but experts. That of the second is: if your prized pig is stolen, consider the facts, such as, who knew about this pig? That of the third is: if you feel you suffer a seemingly impossible medical condition, consult the advice of more than one physician. And finally, that of the fourth is: if you fall in love, take time to learn about the true identity of your beloved before acting upon your feelings. Beneath the surface of sheer comedy produced by Calandrino's character is a serious message as to the fate of one who is constantly the victim of the tricksters, and who constantly lets circumstances overtake him. Calandrino's romance prompts us to consider what might have happened to Andreuccio (II, 5) had he not learned anything from his adventures in Naples. The fact his stories are multiplied by members of the *brigata*, rather than serving as evidence of their self-assurance that they are not like Calandrino, speaks to their latent fear of ending up like Calandrino, a character who at every turn lacks discretion.

The way in which his tales are told, not in a linear narrative, one after the other, but rather interlaced in Days VIII and IX, reflects both the way in which episodes in life occur in real time, and the way in which a character can randomly appear in one's consciousness at arbitrary moments. Rather than adhere to the notion of the beginning, middle and end as dictated by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, the interlaced composition of

Calandrino's stories, reflects as Vinaver puts it, "expansion and diversity of theme and plot, …growth [for both a character and his cosmography], both real and hypothetical."[98] In *The Rise of Romance*, Vinaver notes how romance unfolds in episodes which could be actually going on simultaneously, may have already happened in the past, or could be happening in the future, and he claims that this structure serves to challenge our readerly perspective. Rather than provide one unified action as the *novella* generally does, the romance as a whole takes several themes and characters, puts them in different episodes, all of which makes for great variety and discontinuity in the narrative. Speaking of the *telos* of cyclical literature, Vinaver theorizes:

> This is precisely what the authors of the Arthurian Prose Cycle strove to achieve: the feeling that there is no single beginning and no single end, that each initial adventure can be extended into the past and each final adventure into the future by a further lengthening of the narrative threads. Any theme can reappear after an interval so as to stretch the whole fabric still further until the reader loses every sense of limitation in time or space. And any theme is, of course, "indivisible" *both* within itself and "from other things": it is not even divisible from themes yet to be developed, from works yet to be written.[99]

That the *brigata* chooses to tell several tales about one character, not in a cluster, but rather scattered throughout two days suggests, as critics have asserted, that these tales be read as a unit, as a cycle. The task at hand for the reader of the Calandrino cycle is to unravel the fabric of its design in an effort to interpret its meaning.

[98] Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 75.
[99] *The Rise of Romance*, 76.

To accomplish this task, I will examine each Calandrino episode in terms of the narrative dictates of the two days, as well as in terms of the strategy of the whole *Decameron*, to determine how each one resembles, and differs from, episodes common in romance. Ultimately, Calandrino's imagination is more like that of a romance character rather than that of a character out of a *Decameron novella*, and thus Calandrino perpetually mismanages unfortunate circumstances in his life. Yet after all the adversity, he seems to emerge relatively unscathed, ready to face his next adventure. He maintains the kind of outlook necessary to endure such an overwhelming cataclysm as the Plague. For, no matter how severe his treatment by his trickster companions, Bruno and Buffalmacco, Calandrino's allegiance to them never falters, and he never loses faith in his capacity to survive. As the members of the *brigata* approach the end of the ten days, it is apparent in the Calandrino cycle their thoughts have turned to both the immanent end of their own romantic episodes, as well as to challenges they will have to confront upon returning to Florence.

At the end of Day VIII, the newly crowned Emilia announces to her companions her wish to relieve them of any pre-established theme on her day of storytelling. On this free day of storytelling, Day IX, she hopes to lift a burden from their shoulders, namely the limitation to a particular subject matter, thus allowing for a refreshing variety in the types of tales told. She reasons,

> Dilettose donne, assai manifestamente veggiamo che, poi che i buoi alcuna parte del giorno hanno faticato sotto il

> giogo ristretti, quegli esser dal giogo alleviati e disciolti, e liberamente dove lor piú piace, per li boschi lasciati sono andare alla pastura: e veggiamo ancora non esser men belli ma molto piú i giardini di varie piante fronzuti che i boschi ne' quali solamente querce veggiamo; per le quali cose io estimo, avendo riguardo quanti giorni sotto certa legge ristretti ragionato abbiamo, che, sí come a bisognosi, di vagare alquanto e vagando riprender forze a rientrar sotto il giogo non solamente sia utile ma oportuno. E per ciò quello che domane, seguendo il vostro dilettevole ragionar, sia da dire non intendo di ristringervi sotto alcuna spezialità, ma voglio che ciascuno secondo che gli piace ragioni, fermamente tenendo che la varietà delle cose che si diranno non meno graziosa ne fia che l'avere pur d'una parlato; e cosí avendo fatto, chi appresso di me nel reame verrà, sí come piú forti, con maggior sicurtà ne potrà nell'usate leggi ristrignere. (1025-1026)
>
> (Delectable ladies, we may readily observe that when oxen have laboured in chains beneath the yoke for a certain portion of the day, their yoke is removed and they are put out to grass, being allowed to roam freely through the woods wherever they please. Similarly, we may perceive that gardens stocked with numerous different trees are much more beautiful than forests consisting solely of oaks. And therefore, having regard to the number of days during which our deliberations have been confined within a predetermined scheme, I consider that it would be both appropriate and useful for us to wander at large for a while, and in so doing recover the strength for returning once again beneath the yoke; 645.)

Just as Pampinea did before she told her tale at the end of Day I with her *prato* metaphor, and Filomena did before she told the seventh tale of Day II with her *campo* metaphor, Emilia compares storytelling to pieces of land both natural (*boschi*) and contrived (*giardini*). However, while in Pampinea's speech, storytellers are compared to people who wander for walks in meadows, and in Filomena's, storytellers are compared to knights competing in jousts on the playing field, in Emilia's passage, storytellers are

compared to oxen, beasts of burden. Rather than choose a noble beast, such as the horse ridden by the knight, which could be associated with romance, or a quick-witted beast, such as the fox, which might be associated with trickster tales (*novelle*), Emilia chooses a beast associated with work and restrained activity with which to compare the storyteller. In this way, on this penultimate day of storytelling, the *brigata's* primary activity is being regarded as work rather than play. In Emilia's estimation, oxen who work under the force of a yoke all day (i. e., people who must tell stories according to a predetermined subject) benefit from having the yoke removed and freedom to roam freely through natural spaces (i. e., should be allowed to enjoy at least one day without a pre-established subject matter so as to let their minds wander as they would naturally).

Emilia's motivation to free her companions of the burden from a dictated theme-of-the-day stems from her desire to provide for a greater variety of stories. Again, she deploys a spatial image to rationalize her choice. She admonishes her companions that gardens with many different trees provide more pleasure than forests with only one kind. In other words, the storytelling of the *Decameron* can potentially be a forest comprised of one kind of tree, or on the other hand, a beautiful garden filled with *varie piante fronzuti* (1026) ("a variety of green, leafy plants").

This metaphor is crucial to understanding the reason for Calandrino's multiple appearances in the *Decameron*. While in Day VIII, a day devoted to stories about "tricks that people in general, men and women alike, are forever playing upon one another" (551), his status as the protagonist of two tales is appropriate enough, in Day IX, a free day of storytelling, two more tales about him may appear excessive. Why does

Boccaccio stray from his established formula of *novelle* about different protagonists at this point, so late in the course of the ten days? What does Calandrino's quest represent in terms of the strategy of the *Decameron* as a whole? A close examination of each of the four Calandrino tales with an eye toward how each is similar to romance, as well as different from it, will provide us answers.

In his first episode, *Decameron* VIII, 3, Calandrino goes outside the city wall of Florence in search of a magic stone, the heliotrope. Having heard from Maso del Saggio of the great powers of magical stones from a fictional place called Bengodi, which literally translated means *abundant enjoyment*, Calandrino is convinced that finding one of these stones for himself will provide delivery from the drudgery of his daily life; that is, he will have a life of *abundant enjoyment* in which work is not necessary. The heliotrope, which according to Maso can be found outside Florence in a region called the Mugnone, has the power to render its bearer invisible *da alcuna altra persona…dove non è* (910) ("to any other person where he (the bearer) is (resides) not"). Maso claims,

> è una pietra, la quale noi altri lapidarii appelliamo eliotropia, pietra di troppo gran vertú, per ciò che qualunque persona la porta sopra di sé, mentre la tiene, non è da alcuna altra persona veduto dove non è. (910)
>
> (it is a stone that we lapidaries call the heliotrope, which has the miraculous power of making people invisible when they are out of sight, provided they are carrying it on their person; 563.)

Had Calandrino listened carefully to Maso's double talk, he would have noted that what Maso was saying about the heliotrope amounted to nothing magical or marvelous. What Maso says literally is that when a person carries this stone, he cannot be seen anywhere where he is not. As Branca notes in his textual commentary regarding Maso's description,

> Altre parole che nulla dicono, e invece a Calandrino sembrano dire una gran cosa, perché pronunziate con solennità fracipollesca. (910, n6)
>
> (Other words that amount to nothing, and yet to Calandrino they seem to say something grand, because they are delivered with the same ceremony thatFra Cipolla used .)

But Calandrino is so caught up in the marvel of the magic stones found in the exotic locales Maso is describing to him that he fails to hear what is actually being said. Calandrino is completely taken in by Maso's persuasive speech just as the people of Certaldo are at hearing Fra Cipolla, and thus when he goes out to the Mugnone in search of the heliotrope, there is no doubt in his mind as to its power. He only concerns himself with the way in which to go about finding it, since the only thing he knows about its appearance is that *Ella è di varie grossezze, ché alcuna n'è piú, alcuna meno, ma tutte son di colore quasi come nero* (910) ("The size varies, some of them are bigger and others smaller, but they are all very nearly black in colour" [563]).

Maso's vague and general description, one which could apply to many stones, seems to pose little problem to Calandrino. His thoughts are completely absorbed by the prospect of what he could do if he had the magic power to be invisible, a moot prospect

given the fact that Calandrino misunderstood what Maso had told him. He runs immediately to the nunnery where Bruno and Buffalmacco are working, and claims,

> Compagni, quando voi vogliate credermi, noi possiamo divenire i piú ricchi uomini di Firenze: per ciò che io ho inteso da uomo degno di fede che in Mugnone si truova una pietra, la qual chi la porta sopra non è veduto da niuna altra persona; per che a me parrebbe che noi senza alcuno indugio, prima che altra persona v'andasse, v'andassimo a cercar. Noi la troverem per certo, per ciò che io la conosco; e trovata che noi l'avremo, che avrem noi a fare altro se non mettercela nella scarsella e andare alle tavole de' cambiatori, le quali sapete che stanno sempre cariche di grossi e di fiorini, e torcene quanti noi ne vorremo? Niuno ci vedrà; e cosí potremo arricchire subitamente, senza avere tutto dí a schiccherare le mura a modo che fa la lumaca. (911)
>
> (Pay attention to me, my friends, and we can become the richest men in Florence, for I have heard on good authority that along the Mugnone there's a certain kind of stone, and when you pick it up you become invisible. I reckon we ought to go there right away, before anyone else does. We'll find it without a doubt, because I know what it looks like; and once we've found it, all we have to do is to put it in our purses and go to the money-changers, whose counters, as you know, are always loaded with groats and florins, and help ourselves to as much as we want. No one will see us; and so we'll be able to get rich quick, without being forced to daub the walls all the time like a lot of snails; 563-564.)

Calandrino is so overwhelmed by the fantasy he has created in his mind from Maso's tale of Bengodi that he is unable to consider in realistic terms the possibility of there being a magic stone.

Thus, he ventures out to the Mugnone one hot Sunday morning with Bruno and Buffalmacco, both of whom have been in on the joke with Maso from the very beginning,

finds many stones that fit the description Maso gave him, and believes he has found the genuine article when his companions pretend not to see him. It is only when Calandrino is back at home and his wife scolds him for being out so long on a Sunday morning, that he might potentially face the truth of the joke being played on him. But rather than see the facts plainly, he beats his wife because he believes she has broken the magic spell of the stone.

> "Oimè, malvagia femina, o eri tu costí? Tu m'hai diserto, ma in fé te ne pagherò!" e salito in una sua saletta e quivi scaricate le molte pietre che recate avea, niquitoso corse verso la moglie e presala per le trecce la si gittò a' piedi, e quivi, quanto egli poté menar le braccia e' piedi, tanto le diè per tutta la persona: pugna e calci, senza lasciarle in capo capello o osso adosso che macero non fosse, le diede, niuna cosa valendole il chieder mercé con le mani in croce. (916)
>
> ('Blast you, woman, why did you have to be standing there? Now you've ruined everything, but I swear to God I'll make you pay for it.' And having ascended the stairs, he deposited his enormous collection of stones in one of the smaller rooms and rushed upon his wife like a madman. Catching her by the tresses, he hurled her to the ground at his feet and began to pummel her and kick her as hard as he could until she was bruised and battered all over from head to foot, whilst all the time she was pleading in vain for mercy and clasping her hands in a gesture of supplication; 567.)

Rather than examine the evidence to deduce what really happened, Calandrino quickly and impulsively blames his wife for ruining his marvel. Rather than accept the impossibility of a magic stone, Calandrino looks for a reason as to why the stone became disenchanted by blaming it on the presence of his wife. To further substantiate his belief

in the magic power of the stone, Bruno and Buffalmacco enter the scene, listen to his account of what has happened, pretend to be astonished, and agree with all Calandrino has said. Instead of letting him in on the joke they have played on him with the help of Maso del Saggio, they lead Calandrino to believe that all that has happened is quite reasonable.

Of the four tales, this first one is most like a romance structurally in several ways. First, it can be broken down into the three stages suggested by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*: home; journey into the land of adventures; home again. Calandrino leaves Florence to journey to the Mugnone, just outside the city wall, in search of a magic stone, finds it there, and returns home again. Second, like a romance hero, Calandrino exhibits an appetite that overtakes his capacity to reason. He desperately wants to find a heliotrope in order to liberate himself from the daily drudgery of working to earn a living. And finally, there is a quest at the heart of this story, Calandrino's quest for the heliotrope. Just like the typical romance hero, Calandrino never loses faith in the object of his quest or its magical power.

This tale is unlike romance in that Calandrino is not the typical romance hero. He is not a knight who maintains a strict code of chivalry. Rather than spiritual, his reasons for searching for the heliotrope are material and mundane—he hopes that if he finds one, he will no longer have to hold down a job to earn money. The magic spell of the stone will allow him to disappear and rob the tables of the moneychangers without consequence. Moreover, the "world" of the story is not that of romance in which

marvels can and do happen. Calandrino's world is "disenchanted" (except for him), and the tale literally recounts a disenchantment (except for him).

The second tale of Calandrino, VIII, 6 portrays the protagonist in the same predicament as in the first one with regard to his helplessness in the face of magic and superstition. When the pig he is about to slaughter is stolen, Calandrino begs Bruno and Buffalmacco to help him find the culprit. They agree to do so with the aid of their own version of the polygraph:

> Disse allora Buffalmacco: "Per certo egli non c'è venuto d'India niuno a torti il porco: alcuno di questi tuoi vicini dee essere stato, e per ciò, se tu gli potessi ragunare, io so fare la esperienza del pane e del formaggio e vederemmo di botto chi l'ha avuto." (938)
>
> (So Buffalmacco said: Whoever took your pig, we can be quite sure that he didn't come all the way from India to do it. It must have been one of your neighbours. So all you have to do is to bring them all together so that I can give them the bread and cheese test, and we'll soon see who's got it; 582.)

With his customary blind faith in his companions (who again, as in the first tale, are the perpetrators of the joke; they have, in fact, stolen the pig) and in a magic spell, this time the "bread and cheese test," Calandrino readily agrees to follow the lead of Bruno and Buffalmacco. Popular in the Middle Ages, the bread and cheese test was an actual practice when people were suspected of any sort of crime: they were invited to consume a bread and cheese confection while a magic spell was being recited. When a person was unable to swallow the confection, this was taken as a sign that he was lying, and thus guilty of the crime in question (McWilliam, 853). Again, in VIII, 6, Calandrino

privileges the power of magic rather than his own wit to get himself out of a difficult situation. Just as he believes in the magic of the heliotrope to deliver him from the drudgery of his work, in VIII, 3, he believes the bread and cheese test will identify the person who stole his pig.

Just as in VIII, 3, Bruno and Buffalmacco have orchestrated the whole joke in VIII, 6. It is they who act as purveyors of the test, who have stolen the pig, and who fix it so that the whole affair backfires on Calandrino. When they prepare the confections, all are sweet and tasty except for two made with an extremely bitter marsh weed called dog ginger. At the gathering of Calandrino's neighbors, Bruno and Buffalmacco make sure to offer the bitter confections to Calandrino and the sweet ones to his neighbors, so that the former spits them out and looks like the guilty party himself. The pains taken by Bruno in order to assure the success of the joke are elaborate and nothing short of art.

> Bruno, andatosene a Firenze a un suo amico speziale, comperò una libra di belle galle e fecene far due di quelle del cane, le quali egli fece confettare in uno aloè patico fresco; poscia fece dar loro le coverte del zucchero come avevan l'altre, e per non ismarrirle o scambiarle fece lor fare un certo segnaluzzo, per lo quale egli molto ben le conoscea. (939-940)
>
> (Bruno went to Florence and called on a friend of his, who was an apothecary. Having bought a pound of the best ginger sweets he had in stock, he got him to make two special ones, consisting of dog ginger seasoned with fresh hepatic aloes; then he had these coated with sugar, like the rest, and so as not to lose them or confuse them with the others, he had a tiny mark put on them which enabled him to recognize them without any difficulty; 583.)

It is clear here that Bruno and Buffalmacco do not simply enjoy taking advantage of Calandrino's simple nature. The jokes that they play on him become increasingly intricate and well planned as Calandrino's romance progresses. It is as if Calandrino, caught in the merciless snares of their jokes, becomes Bruno's and Buffalmacco's puppet. Calandrino allows his companions in this way to script his ongoing romance. In fact, in the process of taking the test himself, Calandrino spits out both of the pieces he is given (the ones made with the bitter weeds), and thus ends up looking like the thief.

Again Calandrino places his faith in his companions Bruno and Buffalmacco and the magic they have promised him, and again they repay his blind trust by making him the victim of their joke without ever letting him in on the truth of the situation. Using the results of their test as a final confirmation, Buffalmacco claims,

> Io l'aveva per lo certo tuttavia che tu te l'avevi avuto tu, e a noi volevi mostrare che ti fosse stato imbolato per non darci una volta bere de' denari che tu n'avesti. (942)
>
> (I was convinced all along that you were the one who had taken it. You were just pretending to us that it had been stolen so that you wouldn't have to buy us a few drinks out of the proceeds; 584.)

Once again, not only do Bruno and Buffalmacco successfully manage to play an artful practical joke on Calandrino, but they leave him in a hopeless state of misunderstanding about the situation. Even though Calandrino vehemently swears he is innocent, because he is unable to argue his way clear of the magic of the bread and cheese test, he gives in to their demands:

> Calandrino, vedendo che creduto non gli era, parendogli avere assai dolore, non volendo anche il riscaldamento della moglie, diede a costoro due paia di capponi; li quali, avendo essi salato il porco, portatisene a Firenze, lasciaron Calandrino col danno e con le beffe. (943)
>
> (Seeing that they refused to believe him, and thinking that he had enough trouble on his hands without letting himself in for a diatribe from his wife, Calandrino gave them the two brace of capons. And after they had salted the pig, they carried their spoils back to Florence with them, leaving Calandrino to scratch his head and rue his losses; 585.)

Because he is not able to explain just why he could not pass the test, Calandrino yields to the demands of his companions.

In terms of its link with romance, while this tale does not resemble a romance structurally, Branca notes that the confections Bruno and Buffalmacco use in their bread and cheese test are like confections widely used in courtly romances as ingredients for magic potions (939, n6). A contemporary of Boccaccio must have recognized this detail of the material culture of romance and associated it with Calandrino as a romance character. For, while the matter of the confections might seem a detail of little consequence, their presence keeps romance on the reader's mind. That Calandrino is re-appearing in this new episode in the *Decameron*, rather than disappearing, also serves to re-affirm his status as a hero out of romance.

On the other hand, the voice of the narrator which keeps the listener informed of the proceedings of Bruno's and Buffalmacco's antics at Calandrino's expense makes these tales increasingly anti-romance. Even in the most pathetic of situations, for

example, Gawain accepting the gift of a girdle from his lady love and concealing it in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Lancelot in the humiliating cart in Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, the romance hero nearly always has the undying sympathy of the narrator. In Calandrino's cycle, however, we can hardly identify any mercy on the part of the narrators for their protagonist. Nowhere is this lack of sympathy more acute than in the third episode of Calandrino's romance, *Calandrino pregno* ("Pregnant Calandrino"), IX, 3.

In this tale, his companions are closely watching Calandrino as he seeks out investment opportunities for his recent inheritance of two hundred pounds of brass farthings from an aunt:

> Bruno e Buffalmacco, che queste cose sapevano, gli avean piú volte detto che egli farebbe il meglio a goderglisi con loro insieme, che andar comperando terra come se egli avesse avuto a far pallottole; ma, non che a questo, essi non l'aveano mai potuto conducere che egli loro una volta desse mangiare. (1048)
>
> (When Bruno and Buffalmacco came to hear of this, they told him again and again that he would do far better to spend the money with them, having a riotous time, than to go buying land, as if he needed it to make mud pies. But far from bringing Calandrino round to their own point of view, they were unable to wring so much as a solitary meal out of him; 659.)

As in the previous tale concerning the pig, in this tale Calandrino has something his companions wish to extort from him, this time cash. And again, Calandrino resists any encouragement from them to frivolously waste his wealth. (In VIII, 6, Bruno and Buffalmacco urged Calandrino to sell his fine pig so they could all enjoy the proceeds).

This time, although the joke they play is not as carefully strategized as the previous two, the result is just as gratifying because of the way in which Calandrino's imagination works in reaction to his companions' antics to produce a fanciful outcome. In fact, the joke players need only make some mild suggestions regarding Calandrino's sickly appearance to set the wheels of this tale in motion.

When both Nello, another painter/friend of Calandrino's and a relative of his wife Tessa (we learn this later in IX, 5), and Buffalmacco comment to Calandrino that he looks quite ill, Calandrino panics and does exactly as his friends advise him: he goes home to bed, has his wife cover him up well, and sends a servant of his household with his urine specimen to Bruno's and Buffalmacco's friend, the physician Maestro Simone (protagonist of VIII, 9). Before the messenger arrives at the physician's with the specimen, Bruno is able to let Maestro Simone in on the joke he, Nello, and Buffalmacco are playing on Calandrino. When Maestro Simone goes to Calandrino's home to examine him, it is only a coincidence that the night before Calandrino has allowed his wife to be on top during sexual intercourse. Thus, when Calandrino hears the diagnosis of pregnancy, his impulse is to curse his wife Tessa for having insisted she be on top all the time during lovemaking.

> "Oimè, Tessa, questo m'hai fatto tu, che non vuogli
> stare altro che di sopra: io il ti diceva bene!" (1051)
>
> ('Ah, Tessa, this is your doing! You will insist on lying
> on top. I told you all along what would happen;' 661.)

Just as in VIII, 3 when Tessa is able to see him even though he has found the heliotrope, rather than examine the facts for some sort of rational explanation, Calandrino looks to Tessa as the reason for this inexplicable predicament. Rather than consider the fact that he is most probably not pregnant, Calandrino immediately seeks to scapegoat his wife. Unlike the courtly hero of romance who seeks to protect women, Calandrino is misogynistic. It is precisely this irrationality in confronting his multitude of predicaments that perpetuates Calandrino's romance, and keeps the members of the *brigata* laughing and wanting to tell and hear more about him. For, at the end of this tale, Calandrino does not learn what truly occurred. He listens to Maestro Simone's advice, curses his wife Tessa, never seeks out another medical opinion, but takes the medicine prescribed and mixed by Maestro Simone himself, and feels himself cured in three days.

For his services and trouble, Maestro Simone has Calandrino pay him "five pounds and enough money to buy three brace of capons," probably a sum approaching the amount of Calandrino's inheritance. Once again, Calandrino's companions are able to swindle valuables from him. And while the narrator lets his audience in on all of the detailed circumstances of the joke, Calandrino remains forever deluded with regard to what actually happened. Most importantly, he never once sees the utter impossibility of a pregnant man.

Regarding Calandrino's unwillingness/inability to question the seemingly impossible in this tale, there are potentially two traditions which influence his imagination worth considering: 1) ecclesiastical authority which condemns a woman's being on top during intercourse; and 2) a superstition among peasants of the Middle Ages

of the phenomenon of the pregnant man, known as the *Couvade*, found in a fable by Marie de France. Regarding Church doctrine of the time, Calandrino, like the *brigata*, is clearly aware of the fact that a woman on top during intercourse was listed in the *Confessionale* as being a sin as serious as sodomy.[100] In other words, engaging in such an act could have legal consequences—a fine, jail time, or execution. Upon learning he is pregnant, Calandrino is so overwhelmed by the prospect that he and Tessa have committed an act considered a grave sin that he is unable to consider the absurdity of a man being pregnant.

Furthermore, according to A. C. Lee, in this tale Boccaccio draws on a popular folk tradition known as the *Couvade*, that was old and widespread, and dated back to the ancient tribes of Europe:

> when a wife is about to be confined of a child
> the husband is put to bed and treated as though he
> were about to be confined, the unfortunate wife
> taking his place and doing his work, etc.[101]

Lee proposes two specific literary sources for Calandrino's predicament in IX, 3, one from the romance/*chansons de geste* tradition and one from the fable tradition. From romance, he suggests an association of this tale with an episode from *Aucassin and Nicolette* wherein Aucassin seeks the king Torelore, who lies in bed while his wife fights his enemies. In addition, Lee notes similarities between Calandrino's plight and that of the peasant in the fable from the twelfth century by Marie de France entitled *De rustico et*

[100] See Concetto Del Popolo, *Un'espressione di Calandrino*…
[101] A. C. Lee, *The Decameron: Its Sources and Analogues* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1972), 277.

scarabaeo ("The Peasant and the Beetle"). In this fable a beetle crawls into the rear end of a peasant lying asleep stretched out on his stomach and completely nude. The peasant, awakened by the sensation of the beetle crawling inside him, is so irritated by it that he consults a doctor who tells him that he is pregnant. The narrator recounts,

> (T)hen the peasant felt much worse than he had before, for he really believed it, and the foolish people who heard about it said that it was an omen. They were scared and afraid of him, and they all believed that great misfortune would come to them because of him. Foolish people are so gullible that they put their hope and faith in frivolous superstitions. They watched the peasant to see where the baby would emerge. The beetle crawled out through the same opening by which it had entered, and so they were all fooled.
> This fable illustrates how the ignorant believe something impossible because fakery attracts and influences them.[102]

While the scene from *Aucassin and Nicolette* may have influenced Boccaccio to a certain extent, Calandrino's imagination seems more like the peasant's in the fable of Marie de France than King Torelore's. While Calandrino may exhibit attributes of a character from romance, his utter foolishness and gullibility in this tale, as well as in the previous two, make it more of a lesson, a fable, than a romance whose aim is pleasure. Like the peasant, Calandrino learns nothing in the end, but instead turns over his money to his friends in order to procure medicine to cure himself.

Despite all of his hopes, Calandrino's life never seems to improve in the course of his romance because he is never able to discern that he is the victim of one elaborate hoax after another. His adventure in IX, 3 is climactic and pivotal in terms of his romance in

that the joke played, wherein his companions succeed in making him believe he is pregnant, is by far the most outlandish thing they make him believe in all four tales.

The last tale of his cycle, IX, 5, invokes a fiction that is perhaps the most believable, one that can also be associated with an episode from romance, the tryst. In this tale, Calandrino falls in love with a woman he encounters at an estate where he has been hired to paint frescoes along with Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello. Unaware that Niccolosa, the woman with whom he has fallen in love, is actually a prostitute, Calandrino proceeds to become completely infatuated with her. When Bruno informs him that she must be the wife of Filippo, son of the estate owner, Calandrino exclaims, *Io la fregherei a Cristo di cosí fatte cose, non che a Filippo* (1064) ("For a girl like that, I'd slip one over on Jesus Christ, let alone Filippo" [670]).

Upon hearing of Calandrino's unbridled enthusiasm for her, Bruno proceeds to set the wheels of the joke in motion by pretending to be acting as a go-between, but actually going first to Filippo and Niccolosa themselves to explain *chi era Calandrino e quello che egli aveva lor detto* (1065) ("the sort of man that Calandrino was, and told them what he had said" [671]). In this way, Bruno reasons to his accomplices, "they could all have a merry time at Calandrino's expense over this little love-affair of his" (671).

Just as in the other three tales, Calandrino fails to concern himself with the appropriate issues. Rather than inquire as to Niccolosa's identity, and confirm whether she is truly Filippo's wife, Calandrino worries about Nello, his wife's relative, finding out about his infatuation:

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[102] Marie de France, *The Fables,* ed. and trans. Mary Lou Martin (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications,

> Di Buffalmacco non mi curo io, ma guardianci di Nello,
> ché egli è parente della Tessa e guasterebbe ogni cosa. (1064)
>
> ('I am not worried about Buffalmacco,' said Calandrino,
> 'but we must keep it a secret from Nello, because Tessa
> is a kinswoman of his and he would ruin everything;'670.)

Rather than go about having an affair with Niccolosa with discretion and sophistication as a savvy adult would (as an *avveduto* character from the *Decameron* would), Calandrino behaves over the next two months as if he were an adolescent schoolboy. He brags to his companions how easy it will be for him to conquer her, he brings a musical instrument (*una ribeba*, a rebeck) to work with him in order to serenade her, he exchanges love notes and tokens with her, all the while wining and dining Bruno and Buffalmacco, who he believes are helping him win her.

Finally, when Bruno notices that Calandrino will wait no longer, he suggests that Calandrino gather materials to construct a magic scroll (*un brieve*) so that when he touches Niccolosa with it, she will submit to his desires. The items required to make the scroll are similar to those found in scenes of magic from a romance: parchment from a stillborn lamb (*un poco di carta non nata*), a live bat (*un vispistrello vivo*), three grains of incense (*tre granella d'ince*nso), and a candle that has been blessed (*e una candela benedetta*) (1068). Bruno assures Calandrino that once he touches her with this scroll, Niccolosa will do anything Calandrino commands. Of course, Niccolosa has been in on the whole joke from the beginning, as have the rest of the characters, including Nello.

Inc., 1984), 125.

At Bruno's request, Nello goes to tell Tessa of the whole affair, reminding her of the thrashing Calandrino gave her when he returned from the Mugnone with his rocks, referring, of course, to the first story in the cycle, that of Calandrino and the heliotrope. Thus, at the moment in which Calandrino is set to consummate his love for Niccolosa, who is significantly positioned on top of him, Tessa enters the scene screaming and yelling at her husband,

> Sozzo can vituperato, dunque mi fai tu questo? Vecchio impazzato, che maledetto sia il bene che io t'ho voluto: dunque non ti pare aver tanto a fare a casa tua, che ti vai innamorando per l'altrui? Ecco bello innamorato! Or tu non ti conosci tu, tristo? non ti conosci tu, dolente? Che premendoti tutto, non uscirebbe tanto sugo che bastasse a una salsa. Alla fé di Dio, egli non era ora la Tessa quella che t'impregnava, che Dio la faccia trista chiunque ella è, ché ella dee ben sicuramente esser cattiva cosa a aver vaghezza di cosí bella gioia come tu se'! (1071)
>
> ('You filthy, despicable dog, so you'd do this to me, would you? A curse on all the love I ever bore you, demented old fool that you are. Don't you think you have enough to do, keeping home fires burning, without going off to stoke up other people's? A fine lover you would make for anyone! Don't you know yourself, villain? Don't you realize, scoundrel, that if they were to squeeze you from head to toe, there wouldn't be enough juice to make a sauce? God's faith, it wasn't your wife who was getting you with child this time. May the Lord make her suffer, whoever she is, for she must surely be a depraved little hussy to take a fancy to a precious jewel like you;' 676.)

During this speech, Tessa is scratching Calandrino's eyes and pulling him around the room by his hair, thus repaying him for the beating he gave her in the first story. And to add to the piteous result of the affair, Tessa reveals Calandrino to be as impotent as

Riccardo di Chinzica (II, 10), for according to his wife, *tutto premendovi, non si farebbe uno scodellino di salsa* (313) ("if…squeezed from head to toe there wouldn't be a thimbleful of sauce to show for it" [185]). Moreover, Tessa reveals to Calandrino in this last story where he is featured his ultimate problem in life, that is, he does not know himself. He lacks the capacity to see himself with all of his limitations, and thus he continues to serve as the butt of his friends' jokes.

While critics, such as Branca and Baratto, tend to look for antecedents for this tale in popular culture, I would suggest that it is rather Boccaccio's mock version of a tryst from romance. All of the elements are here, courtly love (Calandrino believes that Niccolosa is Filippo's, his employer's wife); a character here serves as a go-between; there are love tokens (an ivory comb, a purse, rings) and magic love charms (the scroll). In this way, in the last tale of Calandrino's cycle, which began with the quest for the heliotrope, we end with another episode from romance, the ill-fated tryst. Again, the tale is about the disenchanting of the world of romance, though not for Calandrino.

In the *Rise of Romance*, Vinaver explains that medieval rhetoricians favored *entrelacement* in romance because the repetition of themes in different guises and variety made for an elegant composition. Fiammetta echoes this thesis in her introduction to the last tale of the Calandrino cycle, IX, 5. She asserts to her companions,

> Genitilissime donne, sí come io credo che voi sappiate, niuna cosa è di cui tanto si parli, che sempre piú non piaccia, dove il tempo e il luogo che quella cotal cosa richiede si sappi per colui che parlar ne vuole debitamente eleggere. E per ciò, se io riguardo quello che noi siam qui, che per aver festa e buon tempo e non per altro ci

> siamo, stimo che ogni cosa che festa e piacer possa porgere qui abbia e luogo e tempo debito; e benché mille volte ragionato ne fosse, altro che dilettar non debbia altrettanto parlandone. Per la qual cosa, posto che assai volte de' fatti di Calandrino detto si sia tra noi, riguardando, sí come poco avanti disse Filostrato, che essi son tutti piacevoli, ardirò oltre alle dette dirvene una novella: la quale, se io dalla verità del fatto mi fossi scostare voluta o volessi, avrei ben saputo e saprei sotto altri nomi comporla e raccontarla; ma per ciò che il partirsi dalla verità delle cose state nel novellare è gran diminuire di diletto negl' intendenti, in propria forma, dalla ragion sopra detta aiutata, la vi dirò. (1061-62)
>
> (Noble ladies, as you will doubtless be aware, the more one returns to any given subject, the greater the pleasure it brings, provided the person by whom it is broached selects the appropriate time and place. And since we are assembled here for no other purpose than to rejoice and be merry, I consider this a suitable time and a proper place for any subject that will promote our joy and pleasure; for even if it had been aired a thousand times already, we could return to it as many times again, and it would still afford delight to us all. Hence, albeit we have referred many times to the doings of Calandrino, they are invariably so amusing, as Filostrato pointed out a little earlier, that I shall venture to add a further tale to those we have already heard about him. I could easily have told it in some other way, using fictitious names, had I wished to do so; but since by departing from the truth of what actually happened, the storyteller greatly diminishes the pleasure of his listeners, I shall turn for support to my opening remarks, and tell it in its proper form; 668-669.)

Fiammetta in this passage confirms not only the fact that Calandrino's multiple tales have made for great diversion, and thus elegance, in the proceedings of Days VIII and IX, but that there is also something inexplicable to them about his "star quality." Just as Lancelot holds infinite appeal for readers of romance who cannot get enough of him, Calandrino

attracts the *brigata*. What is it about Calandrino that keeps the brigata so delighted? Are the members of the *brigata* laughing *too much*? Maybe not.

That which the laughter at Calandrino's victimization reveals is a need to sublimate the *brigata's* own fears about their own helplessness in terms of the ways of *Fortuna*, the vicissitudes of life. The point is that Calandrino is helpless, too ready to believe in the magical world of romance, whereas the trickster assumes he can act to affect the shape of events in a world where romance is just another fiction he can use to his advantage to dupe others. The Plague represents the reality of the world in which the *brigata* live, a reality they cannot control, no matter what they do or believe. Their tales about tricksters allow them the illusion of thinking humans can control their lives. But to deny that their belief in the power of trickery, of the human will, is an illusion (in the face of the Plague), they identify Calandrino's magical belief in the magical world of romance as *the* illusion, and they tell tales that repeatedly expose romance's illusory nature (for everyone but Calandrino, of course). By identifying with the tricksters in these stories, members of the *brigata* are able to forget that their sense of their own power is an illusion too. But they must repeat the act of storytelling over and over because Calandrino is, in this way, all too like them.

Conclusion

A principal problem in the study of Boccaccio is a failure to consider fully that he was influenced by every type of romance available to him throughout his career. While Branca, Baratto, Quaglio, Almansi, Marcus, and Lucente have discussed this matter in terms of Boccaccio's individual works, particularly the *Decameron*, no one has examined why or how Boccaccio experimented with romance throughout his career. He spent thirteen or fourteen of his formative years (1327 to 1340 or 1341), from approximately ages fourteen to twenty-seven, in Angevin Naples. There he had unlimited opportunity to peruse romances. As Thomas G. Bergin notes, King Robert's Royal Library there was

> a treasure house of learning and letters, containing not only works of science and theology but also manuscripts of romances in such vernaculars as Old French and Provençal.[103]

As a member of the Angevin dynasty, which boasted the noteworthy literary patronesses Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie of Champagne, Chrétien's patroness, Robert must have had a vast collection of romances.

Source studies, such as A. C. Lee's *The Decameron: Its Sources and Analogues* and Stavros Deligiorgis' "Boccaccio and the Greek Romances," have shown that Boccaccio was familiar with many texts not available to the general public—for example, the *Pantschatantra*, the *Bahár-I-Dánish* or Garden of Knowledge, and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Clearly, then, his knowledge of romance extended beyond the

[103] Thomas G. Bergin, *Boccaccio*, 37.

Prose Lancelot. In fact, Boccaccio probably had experience with a great variety of romances, and if not with the works of Chrétien directly, then at least with some version of them, particularly *Erec and Enide*, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*, and *Cligés*.

I am not denying that Boccaccio was influenced by the works of Dante and Petrarch, who openly spurned romance in their works. What I am saying is that he found something worthwhile in romance and used it to his own ends. For Boccaccio, romance offered an opportunity for illusion and an occasion to contemplate, at length, how desire plays a determining role in human behavior. Unlike Dante and Petrarch's work, which focuses on the human struggle to deny desire and strive for what is acknowledged as spiritually good and noble, Boccaccio's work considers how giving in to desire can potentially lead to good. What seems to motivate him is not the focus on a linear path to a higher existence, but the meandering detours that might also lead there. Giving in to desire is, in a way, the essence of romance.

When critics examine the theme of love in Boccaccio's works, they tend to look for parallels between his work and that of Dante and Petrarch. Critics have traditionally debated whether love in Boccaccio's works is endorsed in its strictly carnal form, or whether by using carnal love as a negative example, he ultimately means to lead us to spiritual love. They tend to pose questions relevant to the work of Dante and Petrarch and, of course, to focus on the notion of religious conversion. This approach has proven productive to a certain extent; however, I propose that considering Boccaccio's work in terms of his engagement with genre—particularly romance—will prove equally useful. For Boccaccio, love, whether carnal or spiritual, most often finds its origins in human

desire. And, during the time in which he was writing, desire found no more favorable setting in which to play itself out than the intricate plots of romance.

The evolution of Boccaccio's *novella* form in the *Decameron* results from his deployment of it in conjunction with romance. We see the inevitable presence of romance there because Boccaccio's work cannot define itself without what it negates. No matter how much Boccaccio satirized or parodied romance, it was the necessary enabling genre for his masterpiece.

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